

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Volume 28 : Number Two : Summer 2007

Shame to Grace

Experiencing God

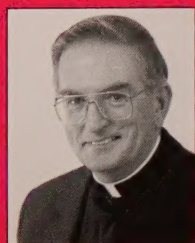
Bipolar Disease and Community

Domestic Violence

Addiction

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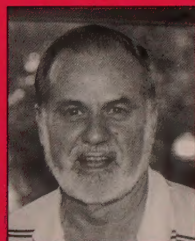
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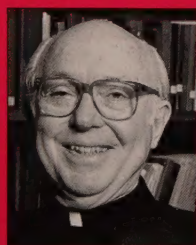
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JAMES J. GILL, S.J., M.D., a priest and psychiatrist, died peacefully on July 29, 2003, after a courageous battle with prostate and bone cancer.

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HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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The editors of *HUMAN DEVELOPMENT* are pleased to consider for publication articles relating to the ongoing work of those involved in helping other people through religious leadership and formation, spiritual direction, education, and counseling.

Manuscripts should be submitted to the Executive Editor, Linda Amadeo, either (1) as e-mail attachments in any Windows-based (not Macintosh) word-processing program from 2000 or earlier or (2) by mail (see addresses below). Unaccepted mailed manuscripts will not be returned unless submitted with a stamped, self-addressed return envelope.

Manuscripts are received with the understanding that they have not been previously published and are not currently under consideration elsewhere. Feature articles should be limited to 4,500 words (15 double-spaced pages), with no more than 6 recommended readings; filler items of between 500 and 1,000 words will be considered. All accepted material is subject to editing. When quoting the Bible, the New Revised Version of the Bible is preferred.

Authors are responsible for the completeness and accuracy of proper names in both text and bibliography. Acknowledgments must be given when substantial material is quoted from other publications. Provide author name(s), title of article, title of journal or book, volume number, page(s), month and year, and publisher's permission to use material.

Letters are welcome and will be published as space permits and at the discretion of the editors. Such communications should not exceed 600 words and are subject to editing.

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Editor's Page

THE REVELATION OF DIVINITY

Recently I read two books by N. T. Wright, the Anglican bishop of Durham and preeminent New Testament scholar, *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense* (New York: Harper/Collins, 2006) and *Evil and the Justice of God* (Downer Groves, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006). I started, in this editorial page, to describe the first, but then thought that I should rather speak of the treasure N. T. Wright, a.k.a. Tom Wright, is for all Christians. *Simply Christian* is being touted, and quite rightly, as the modern equivalent of C. S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity*. It is a tour de force, showing how the Christian story, rightly understood, is soul food for humanity, food that satisfies the deep hungers of the human heart for justice, for spirituality, for companionship, and for beauty. *Evil and the Justice of God* takes up the question that has vexed human beings since the dawn of time and gives a beautifully written and deeply moving response.

Those of us who have read, even devoured, Wright's work wonder how he does it. He is, after all, a husband and father, a scholar and teacher, and now a bishop, yet he produces book after book of New Testament scholarship that rivals anything being written today and popular works that enlighten and nourish ordinary Christians who might not be able to cope with his more scholarly work. Both the scholarly and the popular books are written in an elegant and readable English style that I envy. If you have not yet met this treasure, let me introduce you to him. I believe that reading Wright will contribute to what HUMAN DEVELOPMENT aims at, integral human development.

I first got to know Wright's work after I had finished *Who Do You Say I Am?*, a book whose purpose was to help readers get to know the human Jesus. Someone introduced me to Wright's scholarly work on the historical Jesus. This work, whose overall title is *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press), now comprises three massive volumes with the promise of a fourth. These volumes engage other scholars and show a mastery of the texts and their scholarly understanding of the hundred years or so before Jesus and the hundred or so years

after him. They are not easy reading, not because of their style, which is, as I said earlier, elegant and persuasive, but because of the content and the scholarly apparatus. The first volume, *The New Testament and the People of God* (1992), outlines his method and purposes and examines the period of first century Judaism and the first Christian century to set the scene for what is to come. The second, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (1996), examines all the evidence available and comes to a plausible hypothesis about the historical Jesus that, in my opinion, arrives at a very high Christology indeed. The third, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (2003), looks exhaustively at the evidence and concludes that the most plausible historical explanation for the rise of Christianity is the bodily resurrection of Jesus. A fourth volume on Paul is in the works, I believe.

To give you a sense both of the scholarship and the elegance of language let me cite a bit of what he wrote in *Jesus and the Victory of God* about one of his scholarly protagonists, John Dominic Crossan, the leading light of the "Jesus Seminar":

John Dominic Crossan is one of the most brilliant, engaging, learned and quick-witted New Testament scholars alive today.... He seems incapable, in his recent work at least, of thinking a boring thought or writing a dull paragraph. His major work *The Historical Jesus...* is a book to treasure for its learning, its thoroughness, its brilliant handling of multiple and complex issues, its amazing inventiveness, and above all its sheer readability....

It is all the more frustrating, therefore, to have to conclude that the book is almost entirely wrong.

After a detailed analysis to prove his last point he concludes with these lines:

I began this analysis of Crossan's work by saying that he is one of the most brilliant New

Testament scholars alive today. Sharp disagreement should not make the praise sound faint....

Crossan ... has had the courage to see the whole picture, to think his hypothesis through to the end, to try out radically new ideas, to write it all up in a highly engaging manner, and to debate it publicly without acrimony. With foes like this, who needs friends? May the debate continue.

Isn't that wonderful writing itself and a marvelous instance of how scholarly debate ought to be conducted? But the last paragraph also describes what Wright himself has done with his three volumes.

You will have noticed the overall title of Wright's massive work, *Christian Origins and the Question of God*. What Wright believes and tries to prove is that we know who God is through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. In an article published in *Bible Review* while he was working on these volumes he wrote:

Western orthodoxy has for too long had an overly lofty, detached and oppressive view of God. It has always tended to approach christology by assuming this view of God, and trying to fit Jesus into it. The result has been ... a Jesus who only seems to be truly human, but in fact is not. My proposal is not that we know what the word "God" means, and manage somehow to fit Jesus into that. Instead, I suggest that we think historically about a young Jew, possessed of a desperately risky, indeed apparently crazy, vocation, riding into Jerusalem, denouncing the Temple, dining once more with his friends, and dying on a Roman cross—and that we somehow allow our meaning of the word "God" to be re-centered on that point (p. 29).

Readers who have the stamina and the desire to work through Wright's argument will find their faith in and admiration and love of Jesus deepened.

For those readers who want to get a sense of Wright's conclusions about Jesus without going through the scholarly paraphernalia of these volumes he has written a more accessible work, *The Challenge of Jesus: Rediscovering Who Jesus Was and Is* (Downer Groves, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1999). It is an elegant and eminently readable book. Other books that I have read with profit are *What St. Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B.

Eerdmans, 1997), *Paul in Fresh Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005) and *The Millennium Myth: Hope for a Postmodern World* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999). The first two show Paul in a fresh and engaging light and helped me to read his letters with more insight. The latter develops the thesis "that to celebrate the forthcoming Millennium with integrity does not mean getting ready for the end of the world, but means challenging our prevailing cultures with stories and symbols that say, for our day, what the calendar we are following was designed to say in the first place."

When I introduced N. T. Wright, I wrote, a.k.a. Tom Wright. If you look up his name on Amazon.com, you will find some books written by N. T., others by Tom Wright, the name he uses for his translations and commentaries on every book of the New Testament. The titles are *Matthew for Everyone*, *Mark for Everyone*, *Luke for Everyone*, *John for Everyone*, etc. In each volume he divides the work into sections which he translates and then explains, often introducing the explanation with a story from his own life or from modern times. Most explanations end with some reference to what the passage says to modern Christians. I do not have the whole series – yet. I have the four gospels. (Matthew and John take two volumes.) His sectioning of the gospels correspond rather well to the way the gospels are divided up in the Roman Catholic lectionary for daily and Sunday Mass. They help me to grasp the text and to see its meaning for my life and for the life of the congregations I serve. The translations are down to earth and readable. You could not go wrong to have these six paperbacks in your library and to use them often.

N. T. (Tom) Wright is a Christian treasure I'm very happy I found. I hope that you discover the same.

Now about this issue: It is introduced by my article on what the Irish call "thin places," places where heaven and earth seem particularly close. In that article I mention likely and unlikely thin places. Many of the articles, three of them by authors who, for obvious reasons, prefer to remain anonymous, give us further examples of unlikely places where people have found God: in bipolar disorder, in family estrangement, in a diagnosis of cancer, in addiction, in a picnic table, in the "dark night." May the reading add to your insight and help you in your ministry.

Bill Barry S.J.

William A. Barry, S.J.
Editor-in-Chief

Where Do We Experience God?

William A. Barry, S.J.

While tending his father-in-law's sheep Moses noticed something extraordinary, a bush burning but not being consumed. When he went for a closer look, he heard a voice say: "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground" (Exodus 3:5). This is one of many incidents in the Bible where people felt the closeness of God, where, in a sense, heaven and earth met. Mount Sinai, where God gave Moses the Ten Commandments, became another such place. The tent containing the Ark of the Covenant with the Commandments became such a place. Later Solomon's Temple with its Holy of Holies containing the Ark became the place where God was present, where heaven and earth met.

For Christians, Jesus of Nazareth, an Israelite of the first century of our era, is now *the* place where heaven and earth meet, where the Holy is present uniquely and forever. The baptism of Jesus (Luke 3:21-22) and his transfiguration (Mark 9:2-13) exemplify how heaven and earth meet in him. In Jesus God is so present that Jesus is, in some mysterious way, both fully human and fully divine. To meet him is to meet God. He is "holy ground" *par excellence*.

The title of this article asks the question: Where do we experience God? Where is our "holy ground"? The Irish speak of "thin places,"



In fact, when people tell me that they have a hard time praying, I often suggest that they do something they like to do that takes their minds off their ordinary cares and concerns.

places where the separation between heaven and earth, the sacred and the secular, seems especially porous. God leaks through more easily in these places, it is thought. I would prefer to say that in such places people find the presence of God more easily. Where are the thin places in your life? What makes a place thin? I want to reflect on these questions with you in this meditation.

The Jesuits of the New England province have a retreat house at Eastern Point on the rocky coast of the Atlantic in Gloucester, Massachusetts. For fifty years people have been coming to this place to “find God” or to let themselves be found by God. The setting is magnificent. The main house itself is a stone mansion constructed in the early part of the twentieth century. It faces the open Atlantic Ocean just outside Gloucester harbor. Sunrises are often stunning, and on clear days there is a special glow over the ocean at sunset. After a heavy storm at sea the waves crash against the huge rocks at the edge of the property, sending water and spray fifty feet into the air, a thrilling sight and sound. The atmosphere of the retreat house is warm and peaceful. For the past ten years, I have been privileged to direct young Jesuits from around the world in the 30-day *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola at the beginning of autumn, for many the most spectacular season of the year in our region. Here is a thin place for many people.

THIN PLACES

I mention this thin place not for advertising purposes, but to encourage you to recall your own thin places. Where have you been “surprised by joy,” to borrow the title of C. S. Lewis’ autobiography, surprised by the desire for God, the desire Lewis calls “joy”?

I believe that all of us have experienced such thin places in our lifetimes. Since medieval times people have been drawn to the great cathedrals of Europe,

especially to the cathedral in the small French town of Chartres, because they gave promise of being such thin places. Millions of people over centuries have walked famous pilgrimage trails, like the 500-mile pilgrimage to Campostello in Spain, because of the stories of how others have found God on these pilgrimages. What is it about these places and the ones you have found thin that makes them special?

They take you out of your usual routines, don’t they? Something in these places surprises you, makes you forget your own concerns and worries, and captures your attention. For a moment or for longer you become a contemplative in the primitive sense of that term; you pay attention to something or someone outside yourself. In fact, in some way you lose yourself in that something or someone. The sunrise over the ocean captures all your attention, for example, and for that time you are not aware of the pain in your buttocks or how cold your ears have become or anything else. In these moments God has a chance to break through the self-preoccupation and problems that most often commandeer our attention. This ability to grab our attention is what makes certain places thin.

In fact, when people tell me that they have a hard time praying, I often suggest that they do something they like to do that takes their minds off their ordinary cares and concerns. I recall one elderly religious sister who told me that she hated retreats because they were so boring. When I asked her what she liked to do, she mentioned crossword puzzles and walking in the woods. I suggested that she do this and see what happened. After a few days she said with a wry smile that she was enjoying this retreat, and then, more shyly, that God seemed to be enjoying it too. Another young seminarian found himself very distracted in prayer. He told me that he liked to look at the architecture of the city in which he lived. When I suggested that he do this for his prayer, he said that he would feel guilty. So I said, “Well, pray any way you want to, but the next time you look at the architecture of the city, ask God to go with you and tell me what happens.” It was the beginning of a new way of relating to God. Both of these people had found thin places. They had found places where they forgot themselves for a time and gave God a chance to break into their consciousness.

In a couple of her detective novels P. D. James depicts agnostic characters who, while looking at something beautiful, find themselves in an unusual state of great well-being and having the desire to say thanks,

about not knowing to whom to say thanks. I am convinced that such experiences are experiences of God's creative desire for each one of us and the correlative desire for God that wells up whenever we become aware of God's creative touch. Thin places make such experiences more possible because they capture our attention and pull us out of ordinary routines and concerns.

SCRIPTURE AS A THIN PLACE

Scripture, either heard or read, has been one such thin place for many people. But you have to let the word capture your imagination and attention. Scripture will not be a thin place if you read it for meaning. Billy Collins captures the frustration of the poetry teacher in the humorous poem "Introduction to Poetry."

I ask them to take a poem
and hold it up to the light
like a color slide

or press an ear against its hive.
I say drop a mouse into a poem
and watch him probe his way out,

or walk inside the poem's room
and feel the walls for a light switch.

I want them to water-ski
across the surface of the poem
waving at the author's name on the shore.

But all they want to do
is tie the poem to a chair with rope
and torture a confession out of it.

They begin beating it with a hose
to find out what it really means.

(Used with permission.)

I can imagine God saying the same thing about the way we often use Scripture. Frequently we don't let the Scriptures do what they were written to do, namely to give the Mystery we call God a chance to be met and heard.

LITURGY AS A THIN PLACE

When religious people gather together to celebrate their communion with God, such gatherings often are

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experienced as thin places. There is something about the gathering of people for prayer, especially if they come from diverse families and backgrounds, that sets off sparks in those present, a sense that they are on "holy ground." For Christians, of course, the Eucharist is the gathering that most often is experienced as "holy ground." Even ordinary, seemingly humdrum eucharistic liturgies have something about them that can touch those present with a sense of peace and communion that is both awesome and delightful. They feel one with the Mystery we call God. All the more is this true when the Eucharist is celebrated with striking beauty and prayerfulness and the congregation is large and culturally and racially diverse.

MARRIED AND FAMILY LIFE AS THIN PLACES

In the first draft of this article I did not mention married and family life as possible thin places, no doubt typical of celibate thinking. I realized the lacuna when I read "Marital Spirituality" by the married theologian Thomas Knieps-Port le Roi. He points out that the usual models of spirituality tend to presume a celibate way of life as the norm and to relegate married life to a kind of second-class status in the spiritual life. I invite readers who are married to reflect on your married and family life to see where you have experienced God. Perhaps you will be helped in this reflection by these words of Knieps-Port le Roi:

A spirituality proper to lay people, and especially to married people, will be growing in a different soil and will therefore bring forth different fruits. The soil is the whole range of what the couple experience together: daily routine, moments of intimate exchange, the taking of

Some places are so horrible that they grab our
attention the way places of great beauty do.

into thanks, and a silence in which
another voice may speak.

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That's what thin places are all about, aren't they? They bring us to putting a few words together to address the Mystery, and to silence "in which another voice may speak." For Oliver her surroundings became thin places.

UNLIKELY THIN PLACES

Mary Oliver's reference to "weeds in a vacant lot" leads us to the question of unlikely places for finding God. Most of you will have thought of thin places where you have met God in a special way. Now I invite you to think of some unlikely places, the opposite of the "blue iris" kind of place. Some places are so horrible that they grab our attention the way places of great beauty do. I can still remember my visit over fifty years ago to the concentration camp in Dachau just outside Munich, Germany. What I remember most vividly are the words "Badezimmer" (Bathroom) over the door to the room where men, women and children were gassed to death. They had been told to leave their clothes outside the room so that they could be cleaned and deloused in a shower. But instead of water, poison gas burst from the pipes. I imagined their horror as they realized what was happening. How could human beings do such things to other human beings?

Was this a thin place for me? At the time I was just numb. I believe that I began to cry. I do not remember any sense of God. I wanted to get out of there as soon as possible. Perhaps the ugliness and horror hit me so strongly that I missed the opportunity to let Dachau become a thin place for me. Perhaps many of us miss the thinness of such places of horror because we cannot or do not want to stay long enough to let them become that for us.

Can you think of times when you were in a very unlikely place and there found your heart burning with something mysterious? Perhaps it was in the presence of someone you love who was dying? Just recently one of my Jesuit friends told me of a visit his sister made to their dying brother. Her brother radiated such peace and joy that she felt lifted up herself. An unlikely thin place.

The theologian Belden Lane found a very unlikely thin place, the nursing home where his mother was

decisions about the life they will be leading together. There is no need for anyone to go in quest of this reality; in each marital relationship it is immediately there to be seen. The only question is how it can be developed so that it becomes something significant for faith and for the spiritual life. Or, to put it another way: how can the Spirit be discovered within this reality, the Spirit who makes the couple co-workers and friends with God? (p. 71).

A spirituality for lay people will only come from lay people who work it out in a dialogue with the tradition and their own experience. One way forward is to hear from couples and their children how married and family life provide thin places. These reflections also prompt me to suggest that readers may also find thin places in their workplace. God is present everywhere.

NATURE AS A THIN PLACE

The poet Mary Oliver seems to have been a born contemplative. Read any of her many books of poetry, and you will find someone who pays attention to the world around her. Her latest book of poems, *Thirst*, contains a number of poems that address God directly. The poem "Praying" gives a little instruction on how to pray.

It doesn't have to be
the blue iris, it could be
weeds in a vacant lot, or a few
small stones; just
pay attention, then patch

a few words together and don't try
to make them elaborate, this isn't
a contest but the doorway

dying of cancer and Alzheimer's disease. When she tried to rip out her feeding tube, he had to call for help, which led to his mother having to wear mittens. He writes:

There she lay—miserable, stripped of dignity, incapable of helping herself in the least way—and now betrayed by a son whose best intentions had only made things worse. I left the room, choking on my own helplessness.

But the unexpected occurred that afternoon when I returned to the nursing home. My mother was resting quietly by then, the gloves removed. She looked up and said to me gently, in an unusual moment of lucidity, “Don’t cry, Belden. It’s natural to have to do this. It’s all a part of dying.” With those words a window suddenly opened. By an unanticipated grace, I found healing through the one I’d meant to comfort.

Perhaps you found a thin place at a time of difficult ministry such as the terrible day experienced by the pastoral minister in the acute care hospital whom I know. She found herself moved with compassion for a woman who may have shaken her baby so badly that the baby died. In the process the pastoral minister found herself present with God.

Auschwitz, the Nazi death camp in Poland, seems a very unlikely thin place. Yet there two canonized saints, Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein) and Father Maximilian Kolbe, died. Edith Stein, born a Jew, refused to try to escape to Switzerland from Holland when Jews who were Christian were threatened with exportation to Auschwitz. In compassion for her people she wanted to share their fate. The Franciscan priest Maximilian Kolbe, a prisoner at Auschwitz, volunteered to take the place of a man with a family who had been chosen to die in reprisal for an escape. These are only two of many instances of the presence of a compassion that showed the face of God in this place of unimaginable horror. Even today people who enter Auschwitz speak of experiencing God’s presence.

My sister Mary, a Sister of Mercy, has worked for close to forty years in a home for troubled boys. On one retreat at Eastern Point Retreat House, the thin place mentioned earlier, the retreatants were invited, at the end of the retreat, to speak of their experiences. A number of people spoke of finding God in the beauty of the place, in sunrises and sunsets, in the blue of the

ocean, etc., in other words, in the “blue iris.” Mary said that she had such experiences, but then went on to speak of paying attention to seaweed that at first had seemed quite ugly. As she contemplated this seaweed, she began to see lovely colors in this ugly mess. It reminded her of how she often found grace and loveliness in the troubled boys she works with, who, at first glance, seemed unlovely and unlovable. Seaweed and her boys were discovered to be unlikely thin places.

THE CROSS AS A THIN PLACE

Finally, the most unlikely thin place in all of history was Golgotha where church and state conspired to kill an innocent man. Yet even here the Roman centurion who led the soldiers who crucified Jesus could gasp, “Truly this man was God’s Son” (Mark 15: 39). Ever since that awful and awesome day Christians have contemplated Jesus on the cross and there found God and hope and peace. Unlikely indeed, yet a fact! Perhaps these examples will spur you to spend time with your own “weeds in a vacant lot” to see if they have been thin places for you.

God, who invites us to friendship, is present and active everywhere. As the Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins put it, “The world is charged with the grandeur of God.” Every place on this earth, then, can be a thin place. All that is required to experience God is that we be open to God’s presence.

RECOMMENDED READING

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Knieps-Port le Roi, T. “Marital Spirituality: A Spiritual Paradigm-Shift,” *The Way*, 45/4 (October, 2006), 59-74.

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Passage From Shame to Grace

Anonymous



Christmas morning is a time of light and life, but I awoke this Christmas to the blinding images of a threat to mine, revealed just over a year ago. I had vivid recall of the doctor's tone of voice and exact words. "We have a problem. It's cancer." The siege is over now, and I dare say that I have emerged much stronger than before in all respects. Why, then, was I reliving the trauma of a dreaded diagnosis in the midst of the beauty of Christmas morning? Ah, yes. Light has a way of illuminating anything that is unlike itself. Enveloped in the Messiah's light, I was facing darkness.

CANCER VS. SHAME

I had always thought that cancer must be the worst thing that could happen to a person. I knew there were people who had gone on to live long and happy lives after even the most dire prognoses, but my immediate association with the disease was death. I thought I was dying. Stumbling from the doctor's office to the parking lot, it occurred to me that relief comes with death. I had long been harboring deep and abiding shame, handed down through generations. The thought of being released from such a painful burden was momentarily consoling. By the time I reached my car, my intention

was clear. Though shame was decidedly worse than cancer, I wasn't done yet. I also realized that I was not going to survive. Rather, I was going to live. Thus I began my deliverance from shame to grace.

When the slightest bad thing happens, I tend to blame God. It is a bad habit, I know, and certainly not wise. This time, however, the stabbing shock of the diagnosis paralyzed my usual knee-jerk reaction and opened me to abundant blessings. I knew, too, that I was a member of a privileged class because I had excellent health insurance, allowing me to be selective about my care. Disease became an occasion for grace.

Still, I began treatment with trepidation on the heels of a tsunami in Southeast Asia and my brother-in-law's fatal car accident. I wondered at those apparent signs of desolation in a world that I have always loved as I entered into a decidedly harsh—even violent—course of action. Chemotherapy and radiation therapy, though the best treatments that conventional wisdom has to offer, are foreign to my way of working and not in keeping with how I try to live.

As a teacher of reading and language arts with precious young hearts and minds entrusted to my care, I capitalize upon my students' strengths to fill their needs. I had also spent a year of Saturdays volunteering for my local Catholic Worker community, which deepened my interest in nonviolence. Clearly, the medicine I was receiving would not harness the strength of my immune system and could compromise my natural defenses. I was not enthusiastic about hosting a war, knowing there is always collateral damage from violent battle. I am deeply grateful for access to outstanding medical care, and the cause was certainly just. But war is hardly a mindset for healing.

GRACE AT WORK

To my complete surprise, grace stood boldly in the gaps among blood cells and beside fear as I healed in a soothing cradle of prayer, nourished by great kindness and persistent love. The physicians and nurses who cared for me as well as friends who were present can attest to the fact that I was not a graceful patient. I trembled uncontrollably just stepping over the thresholds of doctors' offices and even minor medical procedures were horrifying to me. But grace was at work nonetheless. Often, I thought of Moses whose arms were held up by Aaron and Hur when they grew too tired for his own strength to bear. "Whenever Moses held up his

Disease became an occasion for grace.

hand, Israel had prevailed; and whenever he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed" (Exodus 17:11). I am grateful for all who held me with my arms extended and palms raised so that I had the advantage of receiving and being amazed by boundless grace. The healing ran deep—well beyond the cellular level, to my very soul.

Friends treated me with more care and tenderness than I had ever known. They stocked my freezer with nutritious food, took me out to dinner, accompanied me on a long series of terrifying and lengthy medical appointments, listened calmly to my fears, and infused me with their own confidence in my ability to heal and to grow through adversity. Countless people carried me in their hearts and in their prayers. Those especially gifted with love also held me in their arms. It was as if I had returned to the womb and my surrogate parents were fanatical about my sustenance during every second of the pregnancy. I had long operated with the belief that I wasn't good enough and had been living and working as if to apologize for being alive—all the while hoping that God wouldn't notice that I was treading upon the earth. As I was born anew, among my closest circle of friends and confidants, it was deeply healing to learn they thought my bald head was beautifully shaped and touched it as lovingly as a mother caresses a newborn child. I was welcome in the world after all!

CONFRONTING THE CROSS

As a little girl I wanted to grow up to become a priest. I celebrated Mass in our living room using my mother's fancy red candy dish as the chalice and Necco Wafers as the host. I am not a fan of suffering, though, and the truth is that I always found the cross offensive. The traditionally prominent display of the crucifix has even made it hard for me to be Catholic. I wanted God to be God. That is, I wanted God to be mighty. I wanted God to be one who rescues. I wanted no part of suf-

fering, and I had startling reservations about a God who wouldn't even rescue himself from the cross. Secretly, I harbored gnawing doubts about the wisdom of one who permits suffering and wondered if such a god might even be false. Yet, it is this very same God of free will who allowed so many kind and generous human beings to surround me and fill me with love. The fact that they chose to do so transformed me.

I used to view weakness as an ugly matter. During my conveyance from shame to grace, however, I caught a glimpse of what Paul meant in 2 Corinthians, concerning his own struggle with affliction.

Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." So I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me (12:8-9).

In *Why Do We Suffer? A Scriptural Approach to the Human Condition* Daniel Harrington, S.J., points out that this "powerful expression of Christian freedom explains why Paul could be so fearless in the midst of all his sufferings undertaken for the spread of the gospel." Unlike Paul, I was hardly fearless. The fact is that I was supremely frightened, but I gained freedom in the face of my own terror, anyway.

I used to think that giftedness was all about superior intellect or extraordinary talent. Now however I know that to be gifted is to be blessed, and I am. Though it is still very new to my consciousness, I find

such blessedness a bit unsettling and quite exhilarating at the same time. In *A Return to Love: Reflections on the Principles of A Course in Miracles* Maryanne Williamson expressed the feeling eloquently. "Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn't serve the world." So I've gone on to live boldly and gratefully in a long conversation and a dance with grace.

Love is powerful medicine, and its liberating side effects are for all time. Suffering, of course, is weighty, too. Yet, as Harrington also notes, Paul's "shocking assertion of Hebrews" is that "the work of salvation took place in the midst of and because of Jesus' sufferings." Because the mystery of the cross "has turned everything upside down," the seemingly negative energy of suffering can be tapped and used for great purpose. "But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us" (2 Corinthians 4:7). So it was in facing darkness that I came to see the Messiah's face.

RECOMMENDED READING

Harrington, D. *Why Do We Suffer? A Scriptural Approach to the Human Condition*. Franklin, Wisconsin: Sheed & Ward, 2000.

Williamson, M. *A Return to Love: Reflections on the Principles of A Course in Miracles*. New York: HarperPerennial, 1992.

Five Seconds At a Time

Anonymous

Hatred is not the least bit foreign to me, I'm ashamed to say. My brother and I have been estranged for many years. The reasons are beyond my understanding, but I know every jagged edge of rejection intimately. Bitter pain does not bring out the best in me. After failed attempts to mend the relationship, I chose to hate my brother in a futile effort to assuage the effects of injury. Retaliation seemed like a good idea at the time. I felt better for a few days, followed by weeks and months and years of writhing pain. I clawed my way to prayer and thought I had reached the pinnacle of my relationship with the Almighty when, finally, I was able to ask God to bless my brother and anyone else in the world who had ever hurt me. I was home free, so I thought. Then came my brother's wedding, to which I wasn't invited, followed recently by the birth of his son. Hatred returned with a vengeance.

Hearing of the birth of a nephew whom I may never meet made me feel as if I were suffering a brutal amputation. Desperate to relieve my agony, I relapsed to hatred, only to find maggots' spiritual kin sucking on the raw tatters of my soul. Though I have read the Book of Genesis, I had never understood the notion of original sin. I have also read the gospels and *did* think I knew something about Jesus' message of love. In fact, I am barely a novice. The birth of a precious newborn baby sent me into a kind of rage that connected me to the rippling waves of original sin. It seemed the pain just



might kill me, so I lashed out in silent, uncontrollable anger. If thoughts alone could do battle, my brother would have been severely maimed by mine. Jesus clearly showed us another way. Yet, I found myself disregarding love completely. With every fiber of my being I wanted revenge. I wanted to fight. I wanted to win. I wanted to be vindicated.

A REVELATION

Just as I declared that my brother didn't deserve anything so beautiful and glorious as a child, it occurred to me, quite miraculously, that God is God and I am not. The whole risky idea of free will came into sharp focus, too. Our Creator made us to be free and wants us to enjoy the kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. In response to the disciples' question about how to pray, Jesus himself provides the formula in the Lord's Prayer (Luke 11:1-4), so it is hard to ignore those pesky matters of forgiveness and temptation. Imagine God placing his kingdom in *my* hands! No mere human would do such a thing, but God certainly has done so. He freely chose to share the salvific power of love—even with me. Still, I wondered if I would be able to love the child of anyone who had hurt me so deeply.

In another moment of grace, I thought of Kahlil Gibran's words in *The Prophet* (1978), which I had read years ago.

Your children are not your children.
They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.
They come through you but not from you,
And though they are with you yet they belong not to you (p. 17).

Ah, yes. Each of us is more than the genetics that comprise our physical being, or the environment and circumstances that influence our lives. God alone gives to each of us our unique and immortal soul. My newborn nephew is not his father, nor is my brother reduced to the cruel forces that have their being in

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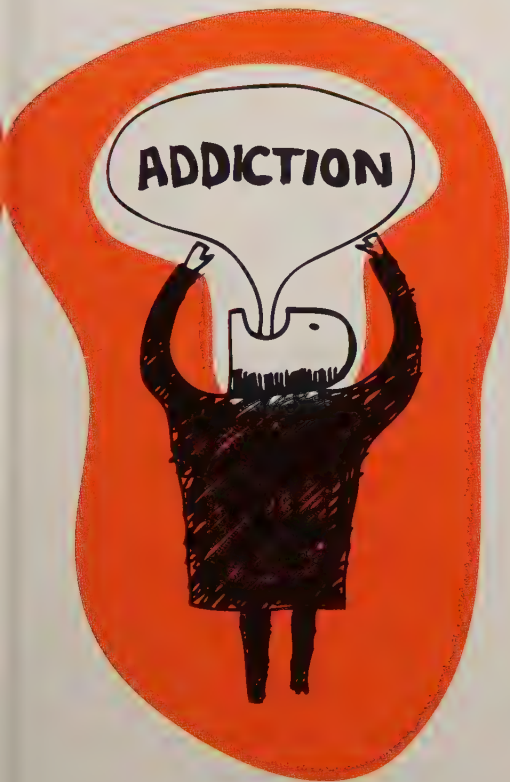
him. As for me, I have come to empathize with and admire alcoholics who live one day at a time. To keep hatred from eating me alive, I have to work my program in five-second intervals.

It has always been incomprehensible to me, as the ways of God often are, that Jesus decided to go through with his passion and death when he surely could have stopped the madness. I've also had a fondness for the idea of a strong, handsome, handyman kind of God; someone who could fix things when they are broken, and clean up after disasters of every scale and kind. But if God acted as Mr. Fix-it, you and I would know little, if anything, of love. Then, knowing nothing of love, we could not possibly know God.

Instead, we have a supremely respectful God who knows from his own horrific suffering every shadow and shade of sin and darkness. He knows the very deepest depravities of the human soul. Through his own suffering and death, Jesus chose to show us that the highest expression of free will is to love without counting the cost. The truth is that love is the opposite of hate and is hate's undoing.

Created in the image and likeness of an infinite God, there is no limit to our relationship with God. There is always more. So I pray that my newest nephew may discover his own precious gifts for this world. May the wise God who created him nourish his heart, his mind and his soul forever. May he live in true freedom. And may his father be blessed in kind.

AN INSIGHT INTO ADDICTION



A Male Religious

About ten years ago, I made a thirty-day retreat. I was 51 at that time. During the early part of the retreat, I was besieged with sexual obsessions and sensual temptations. I tried to deal with these influences on my own for a few days, but when they threatened to hijack the whole retreat, I thought it better to talk to my director. After I had given her a fairly thorough run-down of my sexual history and struggles, she said, "You seem to know yourself rather well. And it also seems that you have tried just about everything you can think of to get some order in this area of your life: you've tried to change things, to accept your situation, to surrender, to get God to work miracles, and so on and on. But let me ask you, have you ever just asked Jesus to come right into the middle of it all and set up shop there?"

I answered, "Well, no, I don't think I've ever even thought of that. I just assumed he would never be willing to be in the midst of such a mess."

"Well," she said, "why don't you try it. Invite him into the middle of your confusion, and let's see what happens. There won't be any instant cures, but it may make a difference." I did invite him in, and things did begin to change. Let me go back and recount the sequence.

UNDERSTANDING ADDICTION

Normally, in the day-to-day flow of life, I have always tended to be swept along by my habitual activities and obligations. But along-

Thus we have the necessary components of addiction: the desire to flee pain and stress, the search for a timeless moment by means of the senses, and the accompanying music of the fantasies, which give the emotional tone.

side these routines, I have become aware that “thoughts” are a cause of anxiety and distress for me. Thoughts usually have to do with the past (memories, resentments, nostalgia, etc.) or with the future (worries, hopes, plans, etc.). When difficult thoughts trouble me and I’m going around in circles “in my head,” making myself more and more anxious, my tendency is to want to call “Time out!”

So, if I take a break, a day off or some space for prayer and reflection, one of the things that helps me center myself in the present moment (away from my thoughts of past and future) is my senses: the sound of a clock ticking or a mockingbird repeating its phrases, a scent of coffee or a fragrance of lilacs, light dancing on water or shimmering on poplar leaves, the warmth of my hand resting on my thigh. As I appreciate the soothing, focusing effects of sensations, it is easy for me to try to anchor myself there, to cling to the pleasures, to enhance the sensations—and this leads me on toward sensuality.

At this point there is a danger that I will get stuck at that level, just below the surface. In fact a whole rich, subtle inner world lies waiting below the senses to be explored and mined for its treasures. I am moving in the right direction, it’s true. The senses are deeper than the thoughts in a way. But I need to keep digging down slowly, past the senses, past powerful energies and emotions, beyond abiding images and archetypes, below conscious and even unconscious awareness, and eventually I may reach a profound place of communion with self and with God.

But all of that depth of possibility can be overwhelming at first, and re-ignites the anxious feelings that pushed me to take “time out” in the first place. So, rather than dig deeper, I allow myself to get stuck on the level of sensuality. However, it is not so easy to stay there—the mind soon tires of the ephemeral pleasures and the momentary delights, and unless I can harness

it in tandem with my senses, it will wander back to its habitual thoughts and worries.

Here is where the fantasies move in. If I can keep my mind busy with fantasies that feed into, legitimize and give permission to indulge the sensuality, I am spared having to pay attention to my negative thoughts and feelings. And if I allow the sensuality to follow its course, I may manage to simulate a momentary feeling of inner harmony, euphoria and wholeness.

Thus we have the necessary components of addiction: the desire to flee pain and stress, the search for a timeless moment by means of the senses, and the accompanying music of the fantasies, which give the emotional tone. Each of these things on its own has a certain legitimacy, but together they enter into a deadly cycle that traps us.

LOOKING FOR A WAY OUT

Whether it is chasing booze, looking for the next fix, or acting out sexually, we are really searching for a sense of wholeness, of oneness, of well-being. But this pursuit is short-circuited or aborted before it reaches its term. We organize our whole life around a ritual which we believe will lead us to an eternal moment, a brief feeling of that completeness for which we yearn with our whole being. Just watch an addict as he seeks his moment of bliss. He or she desperately wants to reach and hold that instant of ecstasy that lifts him out of time, frees her from the tyranny of her thoughts.

However, it all proves a lie, an illusion, and we are left with the wreckage—a vomit-streaked shirt, a raging habit, a life out of control. As the cycle repeats itself over and over, spasms of desperation seize us as we try everything we can think of to break free.

One of the ways we may try to get control of the situation is by attempting to work out “what it means.” This is perhaps the bargaining phase—“let me see if I can figure out what I’m looking for with this behavior, and maybe I’ll find another way of satisfying the desperate need I feel.”

But this doesn’t work either. We merely become obsessed with blame and justification. As a substance addict will focus on the drug of choice and try to figure out the metaphysical attraction of heroin or amphetamine or cocaine, the sexual obsessive will chase himself in circles trying to sort out why he is attracted to this particular type of person, what is the symbolism of that fetish, or the reason she can only be aroused by such a scenario. This pursuit of the “why?” is an exer-

ise in futility. The point is not "why?" The point is "that!" That my life is out of control, that I am destroying myself, that I have tried everything I can think of and nothing works. That I will do whatever I have to do to find a brief, illusory moment of release—if in fact I succeed in finding it.

INVITING JESUS INTO THE MESS

This is the moment of defeat (if you will), of surrender (if you prefer), of acceptance. This is the moment when someone says, "Well, it looks like you've tried everything else. Have you ever thought about inviting Jesus into the middle of it all?"

And you think, "No, I've not really done that. I never thought he'd be willing to come into that sordid mess. And I don't know if in fact he is willing." But the person says, "Well, why don't you give it a try?" And you do, not even knowing what it means to do so. You try to let what you were keeping out move inward. You release your ruthless grip of control, your grimace of refusal just enough to let the center of gravity shift slightly.

And in fact something does begin to change. Slowly things begin to shift, slowly the magnetized filings align themselves in a pattern. The great, snarled knot begins to loosen up, and we see a string of knots and then a string.

Then you realize that you were right in some ways all along. Thoughts are a problem. Senses can be used to help anchor us in the present. The present moment is the place of liberation. Repeating an action can make it part of us. Imagination has a powerful role to play in opening us to deep truth. There is a whole world of meaning within us. All of it begins to fit together as it becomes a place where Jesus stays, a home for his Spirit.

At this point then, possibly, some of the symbolism of our obsessive fantasies may become clearer: the alcoholic realizes that all this time he was "thirsting for the living God;" the over-eater sees she was trying to fill the deep void carved out by shame and isolation; the addict realizes he was trying to feel like a hero in (hero-in) control of his world; the sex addict was desperate to "be in touch" with (or to dominate or to submit to, or just to love) some denied or repressed part of his or her humanity.

One also begins to be able to read the practical messages of one's addictiveness. My acting out "demonstrates" with theatrical precision that "I am out

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of control," "I am desperately dependent on others," "I do try to fix myself, to kill my pain," "I am pursuing unrealities," "My life is turned upside down," "I am poisoning (in-toxic-ating) myself."

CLARITY AND GRACE

At this point we may begin to be able to identify needs and to see that all needs have some legitimacy, at least on a spiritual level. I remember coming across a list of the many psychological needs that humans have. I was amazed to see a number of needs there that it is not considered "healthy" or "socially acceptable" to act upon. But the point is, they are real needs, part of our God-given humanity. And I began to learn that if I read my needs rightly, God can fulfil them all in a healthy and holy way. He becomes everything to me, all that is good and desirable. I think of all the images of God and of Christ in the Bible, in the Psalms, in the Gospels—and I see that God is in fact the ultimate answer to all my needs and desires.

As I turn to him again and again, seated in my heart (where I have invited him to set up shop amidst the chaos), Jesus gradually establishes his order within me and shows me that much that I thought was wrong with me was merely "amiss." He positions things aright, and I begin to see with gratitude that, with his grace as first gift, everything eventually finds its level.

I discover that there is an order to things, a hierarchy, even within me, of energies and gifts, of strata of consciousness, and that at the deepest center he himself abides and remains accessible to me by faith. If my "thoughts" trouble me, I can turn to him deep within, and he will help me, by means of my breathing, my senses, my emotions, my memories, my imagination, my deep desires, my simple awareness, my very being—to know that he is with me here and now.

But there seem to be two other important factors at play. First, in order that I may not become overly self-absorbed, it seems that God will accomplish this reordering only if I also seek him in other people, sharing my poverty and brokenness with them, my neediness and longing, my fears and hopes. We cannot reach wholeness in ourselves if we are not one with our brothers and sisters. For me, the context of my ongoing discoveries is shared community life and recovery fellowship.

One of the clearest messages of all our obsessions is that “I need”—not a drink, a fix, “a lay,” a lover—but to be part of humanity. “I need” the grace to be open to life. In fact, I need others, and I need God.

Here is where the second factor comes in. So that I am not tempted to take my awakening spiritual self too seriously, God reminds me of the relative insignificance of all my strivings and struggles. For me this reminder was provided by my long-term spiritual director, who told me specifically before I went on this retreat that I “should not pay much attention to” my feelings, thoughts, desires, sexual urges, insights,

career plans, worries about community, apostolic concerns, psychological integration, spiritual growth, “or any of those other superficial things.” I laughed out loud. He had listed all the things that I ever talked about. For good or for bad, I can get caught up in “the wonder of my being.” I need to be reminded that it is all ultimately straw—or better, mud—and that only God is absolute. God is worth everything.

I believe that the reason God has allowed me to experience these painful humiliations and undergo these tedious trials is so that I might learn a little humility. Humility—knowing the truth about ourselves—is the only foundation on which God can build a spiritual life. God seems to value nothing more than humility. “The only wisdom we can hope to acquire/ Is the wisdom of humility: humility is endless.” (T.S. Eliot, *East Coker*).

When I no longer have the energy to hide my shame from other people who can help me, and when I am no longer too proud to ask God to come into the middle of my mess—then, new things start to happen.

The author wishes to remain anonymous.

Motivations for Volunteering

What makes people volunteer their time and energy for others? Researchers Mark Snyder, Ph.D., psychologist at the University of Minnesota and Allen Omoto, Ph.D., psychologist at Claremont Graduate University, have come up with five primary motivations for volunteering:

1. It satisfies personal values.
2. It helps a particular community to which one is attached.
3. It makes one feel better about oneself.
4. It helps one to gain a better understanding of other people or cultures.
5. It helps one with personal development.

In other words, motivations for volunteering can be both altruistic and self-centered, and in the same person. Further studies in how an organization can hold on to volunteers reveal that people whose experience in the volunteer role matched their motivations were more likely to continue volunteering. In other words, organizations that helped their volunteers to achieve their personal objectives in volunteering were more successful in holding on to them. These and other results were reported by Lea Winerman in *Monitor on Psychology*, December, 2006, pp. 38-41.

Aging as an Opportunity

Myles N. Sheehan, S.J., M.D.

How often do we think of aging as an opportunity? In the Principle and Foundation of the *Spiritual Exercises*, St. Ignatius urges us to desire neither a long life nor a short life but rather recognize that in either of these possibilities God is present and working to bring us closer and into a deeper relationship of love. Given that in Ignatius' day the possibility of a long life was much less than it is for us in the twenty-first century, there is an obvious conclusion: God is up to something. (I recognize that there are marked disparities in the world today because of infant mortality, HIV-associated illnesses, and starvation caused by human-made disaster and selfishness. At the same time, an increasingly long-lived population is a world-wide trend.) I believe that we will have a richer sense of aging when we move away from excess preoccupation with a narrow view of health that emphasizes the biological and look at aging more holistically. Specifically, I suggest that we will have a better understanding of the opportunities long life can give us as we face the spiritual challenges and prospects of aging.

In my medical practice specializing in Internal Medicine and Geriatrics, I sometimes laugh that I have experiences almost exactly opposite to one of the encounters of Jesus. At one point he was asked by the rich young man: "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Mark 10:17). I am asked by older people, rich and poor, men and women: "Doctor, what must I do to live a long



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life?" As the conversation continues, I find myself telling my patients: "You must exercise and avoid being overweight. Take your antihypertensive medications and pay careful attention to your blood glucose. Make sure your LDL cholesterol is low and your HDL cholesterol is high. Have a colonoscopy." My patients frequently respond: "Doctor, I have done all that for years." At that point I usually end the conversation with a comment like "Good for you." But I am tempted to suggest to at least some of my patients: "There is one more thing you must do. You must give up what you have and follow the Lord."

There are a number of reasons why I don't say something like that. A lot of my older patients are much better disciples than I am, and it would be incalculably presumptuous of me to suggest otherwise. I also do not have the insight of Jesus or that type of authority during office hours. But if we think of the old man or woman who is rich in years, and who comes to Jesus, what do you think would be his response to a question about living a long life?

ASSESSING HEALTH AND WELLNESS

One of the challenges many of us, especially North Americans, face, something, I suspect, that Jesus might bring up to us, is that we can be more than a bit obsessive and narrow in our view of health. This obsession shows itself in multiple ways, from endless advertisements for laxatives and stomach medications, to an almost Gnostic devotion of some to health foods and alternative therapies, and with a remarkable zeal in others for exercise, cosmetic surgeries, and multiple medical tests and investigations. True enough, I also spend time with persons who come to me who have neglected their health badly and are at risk of dying earlier than need be because of such neglect. But my

larger point is to suggest that a long life is healthy not simply from a narrow perspective of medical assessment and measurement.

George Engels, a renowned psychiatrist at the University of Rochester, developed what has become known as a biopsychosocial model for assessing a person's wellness or appreciating what happens to a person who is sick. Engels emphasizes that wellness is not simply what goes on with disease or with the absence of disease; it also includes our psychological health, and how we interact socially both with those in our immediate group and with the larger society. Similarly, when someone is sick, it is not simply diabetes, or heart disease, or cancer that is at issue; also crucial is the person's psychological responses and the social network that may or may not be present to provide support. In addition to the biological, psychological and social aspects of this model of what it means to be human, the spiritual component is also increasingly recognized as another overlapping domain, one that deserves its own attention. Thus in thinking about what it means to be healthy as we age, there are four elements to consider: biological, psychological, social, and spiritual.

Aging represents an opportunity to have more time in this life to become the person God wants us to be. I am not going to discuss all the medical aspects of increasing longevity, but I will emphasize some points from clinical geriatrics. The hallmark of an aging population is diversity. This diversity manifests itself in a number of ways. Fundamentally, chronological age tells us little about what a person is like. Someone who is 82 may be independent, active and involved or may be depressed, sick, and needing assistance. This recognition of diversity is central to understanding that there is no one way or right way to age and no stereotypical outcome to the aging process. Healthy older aging is much more than having good cholesterol and wonderful laboratory results. Health also requires psychological well-being. Aging brings changes, sometimes just because of the march of time, but also changes in relationships, family, work, and ways in which one lives and works. Adaptability to change and loss is crucial to staying healthy. Socially, there are also healthy ways in which we interact with others, sometimes with assistance, sometimes independently. One can recognize unhealthy aging in some who are isolated because of their own stubbornness or fear. Socially and psychologically, there is much to admire in the very old person who recognizes a need to move out of the big family house and

seek another living situation. Individuals who cling to their presumed independence as they age, living alone and refusing help, can end up with the fewest options when they become ill. Spiritual aspects of aging may be crucial in the person's sense of self and how they experience aging. Adaptability and a willingness to look at the way God is doing new things even with increasing years, and sometimes increasing physical problems, mark those who remain spiritually vibrant.

The question I would like to ask the Lord, from my perspective as someone who cares for older persons and now is over fifty: "Master, what must I do to live a long life that will bring me closer to you and eternal life?" It may well be that the Lord will answer in the same way he did to the rich young man, to give all to the poor and then follow. But I can also think of some other responses that may have the same amount of challenge and encourage us to risk and change as we age and come closer to meeting God.

HOMEOSTASIS OR HOMEOSTENOSIS

A hallmark of biological aging is a lack of the physiological reserve that characterizes younger organisms. *Homeostasis* is the term for the ability of an organism to maintain functioning in the face of a variety of stresses. As an example, a young person may be dehydrated and not feel well in the face of a diarrheal illness. An older person with the same illness may be faint, fall when getting up, and be confused. The adaptive responses that characterize a younger person, the ability to maintain homeostasis, decline with age. There is less margin for error in an older person; the functional reserve is often lost: minor problems can have major consequences. The loss of adaptability and the development of impaired responsiveness are sometimes called *homeostenosis*. Biologically, one can maintain adaptive responses by weight reduction, exercise, and other preventive measures. In the psychological, social, and spiritual parts of our humanity, I suspect that the Lord would urge us to avoid rigidity in all these realms. Biologically, there is a limit to our lives. We will all die. And although there is a lot of hype about life extension, it is nonsense to suggest that biological immortality can be achieved, probably ever, but certainly not in our future. A good older age is one that would maximize our openness to change and adaptability psychologically, socially, and spiritually.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR NEW LIFE

This brings me to ponder, as we face increasingly long lives, how we might look at human development and spiritual change with increasing years. The metaphor of homeostenosis, the rigidity that leads to disaster in the face of a crisis, fits the need for spiritual suppleness in facing old age. Can we look to a God who is continually active in our lives? Given Ignatius' insistence that Jesuits repeat the full *Spiritual Exercises* twice in their lives, at the time of entrance into the novitiate and then again fifteen to twenty years later, prior to final vows, it seems he was aware that time and life bring a new opportunity to experience the dynamics of God's love in our lives. Recognizing the opportunities that exist in aging may lead us to look more carefully at some of the dynamics of God's action with increasing years. For example, one older person may well have deepening experiences of God's love and call. Another may, perhaps for the first time, experience what it means to be loved by God. Following Christ may allow another to move from an isolated and stubborn clinging to independence to acceptance of a new living situation. Living through Christ's Passion may produce a differing sense of limitation, loss and fear of death for an older person than a younger one. And finally, perhaps the chance to experience the reality of God's grace and life in the light of Resurrection may have a rich resonance for older people who realize they are very close to experiencing the end of their time on earth and entering their definitive life in Christ.

What are the greatest opportunities for development and new life as we age? I believe they come in recognizing the gift of added years as a time to become increasingly free of those things that keep us from a deep relationship with God and to be open to the ever present invitation to find God in all things.



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Though It Be Night

James Torrens, S.J.

SONG OF THE SOUL REJOICING TO KNOW GOD BY FAITH

("Cantar del Alma que se huelga de conocer a Dios por fe")

Saint John of the Cross

How well I know that spring outflowing and running,
though it be night.

1. That everlasting spring hides itself away,
yet where its outlet lies I can well say,
though it be night.
2. Its origin I know not, for it lacks one,
but I know each origin was there begun,
though it be night.
3. I know that nothing can be half so fair,
and that the earth and heavens drink there,
though it be night.
4. Well I'm aware there is no bottom to it,
and no one ever could pass through it,
though it be night.
5. I'm sure its clarity cannot to darkness come,
and all our light takes origin therefrom,
though it be night.
6. I know its watercourse to so abound
it freshens hell and heaven and the earth around,
though it be night.
7. The stream outpouring from this ample source
I know to have almighty skill and force,
though it be night.

8. This stream that from the two proceeds
I know that neither of the two precedes,
though it be night.

9. This everlasting spring, hid from our eyes
within this living bread, makes our life rise,
though it be night.

10. Here it invites us creatures to its stream
and we drink deep, however dark it seem,
since it is night.

11. This living fount that so attracts me
I can within the bread of life well see,
though it be night.

Translation by James Torrens, SJ

I was introduced to this poem and encouraged in its translation by Archbishop John Quinn (retired) of San Francisco. Months after translating it, as I return to it now, I suddenly get some inkling of what it is all about. I confess that it was the sound of the poem in Spanish that first enticed me. An unrhymed version in English appears with the original in *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, translated by Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D., and Otilio Rodriguez, O.C.D., but without rhyme and rhythm we miss out on the captivating music, which is a hallmark of Saint John.

The principal and most striking feature of this poem, in Spanish as well as in translation, is the echoing phrase, *aunque es de noche*, "though it be night." (Kavanaugh and Rodriguez translate "although it is night.") City dwellers of this era rarely get the full impact of night. In a city there are street lights, lit windows. In country places, however, the darkness can be thick. Out in the open, often, no foot can move at night, as backpackers readily discover in the mountains. Jesus himself refers to night as a time "when no-one can work" (John 9:4).

The speaker of this poem, or canticle, then, is emphatically in the dark. The refrain provides an

atmosphere and background which we realize is the darkness of God, the dense mystery of God's being and purposes in which we are all enveloped. The *deus absconditus*, or hidden God, of Isaiah (45:15) dwells there, not in a darkness of shadows or menace, which we pray against mightily in Night Prayer, but simply at a far remove from our constricted vision.

The canticle announces its subject in the opening words, *aquella eterna fonte*, "that everlasting spring." Mysterious effects, life-giving benefits, come to us palpably in our spiritual life, yet their source is beyond us. These refreshing favors, though invisible, are beautiful—"nothing can be half so fair." And they are immensely nourishing; "the earth and heavens drink there."

The first seven sections of the canticle allow us, in a general way, to dwell in the biblical image of the nourishing waters. "With joy you will draw water at the fountain of salvation" (Isaiah 12:3). In section 8, however, the identification of the spring, or fountain, sharpens, even though at this point the text of St. John of the Cross taxes the understanding and pretty much defies translation. Fathers Kavanaugh and Rodriguez make clearer sense of it than does my rhyme: "I know that the stream proceeding from these two/ is preceded by neither of them." One has to ask "What two?", for there is no earlier reference. But the answer has to be Father and Son, because in Trinitarian theology the Holy Spirit is understood to proceed from the Father and Son, and to be of equal standing, not to be preceded by either. Reading backwards then, we see that Saint John is pulling out all the stops in praise of the Holy Spirit.

The three concluding sections, by means of their imagery, connect the living water to the bread of life. The Holy Spirit is recognized as active in the Holy Eucharist, enlivening all who receive the living bread, like a leaven at work in the bread and in us. The Holy Eucharist is a source of the Spirit for us.

The final note sounded by the canticle is once again the echo, "though it be night." The darkness has not lessened; it is still the surrounding of our existence.

Philosophical minds often perceive this sharply, especially today. In a tribute to Karl Jaspers, the Catholic historian of philosophy James Collins once wrote this diagnosis of agnosticism: "The ambivalence of religious interpretation is intrinsic to the human situation at all times, although we are experiencing our own bafflement and agony concerning the hidden God" (*America*, March 22, 1969). Jaspers could refer to human life as a "being towards death." Admittedly the prospect of death con-

tains, for those who confront it, a fearful darkness.

Life itself, too, imposes some intense darkness at times, and at other times a lingering darkness. "Be kind," the Jewish philosopher Philo advised, "for everyone you meet is fighting a great battle." *Darkness Visible* is the expressive title that William Styron the novelist chose for his account of battle with depression, that affliction as terrible as any we know of.

Saint John of the Cross, who endured a humiliating imprisonment by his own religious brothers, knew all about acute existential trials, the dark night of the senses, as well as the times of feeling utterly without compass in the dimension of the spirit.

And none of this daunted him. Gerald May, in his study of John and Teresa of Avila, *The Dark Night of the Soul: A Psychiatrist Explores the Connection between Darkness and Spiritual Growth*, writes: "The dark night of the soul, in John's original sense, . . . is a deeply encouraging vision of the joys and pains we all experience in life. . . The divine presence doesn't intend us to suffer, but is instead *with* us in all the experiences of life, in both suffering and joy."

May goes on to explain that in the night there is "divine activity: a continually gracious, loving and fundamentally *protective* guidance through all human experience." (May loved to put key words in italics). Saint John's canticle, once we probe its meaning, ascribes this "divine activity" to the Holy Spirit. How can we detect and respond to this activity? In the darkness of faith, of course. Faith—a reaching beyond the palpable, a letting oneself be drawn out of the near-sighted self—enables us to drink from that ever-flowing fountain.

This poem is what its author calls a *Cantar del alma*, a song, or outburst, of the spirit rejoicing to know God by faith. The saint as much as says to us, "How can I keep from singing?" And the frequent occurrence of the phrase "I know" in his text makes it clear that, for him, this is a sure thing, this is the reality within which he lives. Of course his purpose in writing is to invite each of us, in our own spirits, to be slaked joyfully by the waters of this Holy Spirit.



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HOME

Margaret Cessna, H.M.

I pulled into the familiar old driveway for what may have been the last time. I got to the house an hour early so that I would have time for a final pilgrimage. I went to every room, top to bottom, and thought about something familiar, something treasured in each room in order to see one last time what my heart would always remember. Then I sat on the front porch.

My mother had died six months before, and my father had moved to an assisted living complex. I was getting ready to sign a contract with a realtor to sell the home that had been in our family for more than forty years.

The front porch had been a special place for all of us in the family. It became the main room in the summer and fall. We all hung out there when we visited. Thankfully I had listened to my brother's suggestion to take the round, wooden picnic table that he had built. It had been on the large front porch for years. He loaded it onto his truck and delivered it to me a few weeks before the closing of the house.

I signed the papers and handed over all of the keys. Having done my duty, I backed out of the driveway and cried all the way home. For seventy miles I cried. And I remembered. And I gave thanks for all of the love, warmth and generosity that had happened in that house, in that home.

After exiting the freeway I stopped at Home Depot for an important purchase. I knew it would be in hardware, but I did not have the energy to look. A Home Depot employee was on the top step of one of the big orange ladders.

"Can you point me to upholstery tacks," I asked, knowing that she could not detect my swollen eyes from that distance.

"Well, they are in the next aisle," she said, "but may take time to find. Let me get down from here and

I will show you where they are located."

When she reached ground level she looked at me and asked, "Are you ok?"

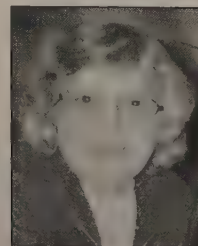
"I will be when I get the tacks," I replied.

She took me directly to the little peg where they were hanging. After thanking her I went to the self-check out because I did not want anyone else to notice my distress.

I drove to my apartment building on Lake Erie and went directly to my balcony. I used the upholstery tacks to secure a flannel-backed table cloth to the picnic table. Then I smiled and said to myself, "The house is gone. The table is not."

And neither are the memories. Though it might be time to move on, I have plenty to take with me on the journey ahead. Not the least of which is an old picnic table with a brand new flannel-backed tablecloth now sitting pretty on my windy balcony.

When my family visits in the summer and fall, we hang out on the balcony. Around the table. We have become home to each other now. And we celebrate the comfort that we find in having an old picnic table to center us. An old picnic table with a new flannel-backed tablecloth. Tacked down. Secure in whatever wind may blow.



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CONNECTING CENTERING PRAYER AND THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

William Sheehan, O.M.I.



Two watershed experiences in my own spiritual journey were a 30-day retreat at Eastern Point Retreat House in Gloucester, Massachusetts in July, 1976 and a 14-day intensive centering prayer retreat that took place at the Lama Foundation located in the mountains of northern New Mexico in 1983 led by Thomas Keating, O.C.S.O. In this article I would like to identify some points of convergence that I experienced between the spiritual exercises and the practice of centering prayer. These points of convergence have become more apparent to me as I reflect upon some of the more recent insights in the writings of Keating.

THE INNER ROOM

Seeking to identify a core scriptural text that supports a contemplative practice like centering prayer, Keating points to Matthew 6:6, "But when you pray go to your inner room, close the door and pray to your Father in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you." With this foundational text he raises an important question: if we feel attracted to the inner room, then how do we begin to access it? In other words, how do we begin to go beneath ordinary

Keating points out that if we desire to enter our inner room, we need to embrace a spiritual practice like centering prayer that will begin to move us from the head to the deepest level of the heart.

psychological awareness to a deeper level of spiritual attentiveness where we experience our union with God? Keating points out that if we desire to enter our inner room, we need to embrace a spiritual practice like centering prayer that will begin to move us from the head to the deepest level of the heart.

Once we begin to access our inner room through the practice of centering prayer, Keating raises another significant question, "What begins to happen when we enter our inner room?" He describes three moments that begin to unfold. The first moment is that we allow God the opportunity to affirm us in the very core of our being. Through its receptive nature, the practice of centering prayer allows us to receive, that is, to consent to the continuous inflow of God's love that is being shared with us at each moment. The only activity in centering prayer is consenting to the love, presence and action of God within us, and to let go of all thoughts and just *be*.

RECEIVING AND CONSENTING

It is in this initial moment of being in the inner room that I experienced the first point of convergence between the spiritual exercises of Ignatius and the practice of centering prayer. I recall that during my thirty day retreat, as I prayed over the principle and foundation, I was encouraged to pray for the grace to accept the gift of God's unconditional love. As I prayed over Scripture texts like Psalm 139, Isaiah 49 or John 15, the power and presence of God's Word seemed to bring me to "my inner room." The awareness of God's unconditional love, revealed through God's Word, seemed to arise now from within my heart. There came a point in this experience that I was given the grace to

accept, or as Keating would say, to consent to the gift of God's unconditional love. It was as though I experienced a "transfiguration moment" in which I felt a deep sense of God's love. For me this moment was an acute awareness of being radically connected to God and creation. This was a special grace as I felt very secure and a new kind of communion with God.

GROWING IN TRUST

The second moment in the inner room is identified by Keating as the willingness to deepen our capacity to trust God. Growing in trust begins to arise out of the experience of being loved by God in the way in which God desires to love. This means being loved by God on God's terms, not on my own. In this second moment I experienced yet another point of convergence between the spiritual exercises and the practice of centering prayer. Both forms of prayer have allowed me to experience being loved by the One who created me. As I consented more and more to God loving me as I am, my capacity to trust God also grew.

FACING THE FALSE-SELF

The third moment in the inner room comes when we allow God the space to begin to "soften up" the hard core of the false-self system. In centering prayer and the Spiritual Exercises the false-self is seen against the light of God's unconditional love. This brought for me a recognition of my need for healing. Keating describes this healing in his book *Open Mind, Open Heart*. He states that there are various types of thoughts that may occur in centering prayer. One type of thought is psychological unloading. This has to do with the hurts we have absorbed in a lifetime. These undigested or unprocessed hurts remain buried within our unconscious. These hurts become interior blocks that can hinder the free-flow of God's love. In the practice of centering prayer God begins to soften up the hurtful material of our lives which have been absorbed in the body. This material begins to emerge to the level of conscious awareness in the form of highly charged emotional thoughts. As we become engaged in these thoughts, the practice of centering prayer encourages us to let go of these emotionally charged thoughts by returning ever so gently to our *sacred word*, the symbol of our consent to the love, presence and action of God. The practice of returning to the sacred word gives God the space in our minds and hearts

to heal our wounds at their very core.

Another way that Keating describes this same process is that Jesus as Divine Healer invites us to accompany him back through the stages of our human growth and development. With our consent in the practice of centering prayer Jesus begins to heal the wounds we may carry within a particular stage. As I mentioned above, these developmental wounds begin to emerge on the level of conscious awareness in the form of highly charged emotional thoughts. We acknowledge these emotions and thoughts, then let go of them through the use of our *sacred word*. In doing this we again allow God the interior space to heal these wounds.

SINFULNESS AND HEALING

In the third moment in my inner room I experienced another point of convergence between centering prayer and the *Spiritual Exercises*. Keating's teaching on psychological unloading and Ignatius's encouragement to pray for the grace to experience one's own sinfulness are very similar. During my 30-day retreat I was able to experience a renewed connection with the gift of God's unconditional love. My director encouraged me to pray for the grace to experience my own sinfulness. In response to this grace a painful memory began to emerge for me part-way through the retreat. This memory involved a breakdown in a family relationship because of a mutual misunderstanding. As this memory began to surface with all of its emotional intensity I began to relive this past experience. My director suggested that I was being asked by God to forgive the one who contributed to such hurt in my life. I could feel the emergence of a strong resistance to forgive. Again the director encouraged me to pray for the grace to forgive so that I would be healed of the hurt that was deeply embedded in my psyche. Fortunately, working through the exercises brought about divine healing for me. This was very much like Keating's description of psychological unloading.

I have been practicing centering prayer since 1983. Consistently I notice the overlaps with the *Spiritual Exercises*. Both of these prayer forms have reinforced within me the sense of being deeply loved by God. The fact that I have been able to rely on both forms of prayer has provided me with a level of spiritual strength to trust God. Such trust has allowed for other healings in my life. Now 24 years later I am profoundly grateful to God for the blessing that these prayer forms have been for me. Not only have they enriched my life as a religious and a priest, but they have substantially strengthened my conviction that God-in-Christ is experienced in living life to the full.

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THE BIPOLAR RELIGIOUS AND COMMUNITY

THE BIPOLAR RELIGIOUS AND COMMUNITY

Benedict Auer, O.S.B.



Bipolar Disorder is a mood disorder originally called manic-depression that characteristically involves cycles of depression and mania. Sometimes the mood switches from high to low and back again are dramatic and rapid, but more often they are gradual and slow, over weeks or even months, and intervals of normal mood may occur between the manic and depressive phases of the condition. The characteristic symptoms of both the depressive and manic cycles may be severe.

Both phases of the disease are deleterious. Mania affects thinking, judgment, and social behavior in ways that may cause serious problems and embarrassment. For example, an inflated sense of self-importance, increased talkativeness and flights of ideas or racing thoughts may take place when an individual is in a manic phase. Depression can also affect thinking, judgment, and social behavior in ways that may cause grave problems, such as a depressed mood for most of the day, almost every day, a loss of interest or pleasure in almost all activities, almost every day, and feelings of worthlessness or excessive feelings of guilt, to name but a few. Bipolar Disorder also elevates the risk of suicide.

According to the DSM-IV-TR, a diagnosis of Bipolar I Disorder requires one or more manic or mixed episodes. The current or previous course of the illness may include hypomanic and depressive episodes also, but the diagnosis of Bipolar I Disorder requires only one manic or mixed episode. A depressive episode is not required for a diagnosis of Bipolar I Disorder, although often people with Bipolar

Disorder suffer from them as well.

Bipolar II Disorder, the more common but by no means less severe type of the disorder, is characterized by episodes of hypomania and disabling depression. A diagnosis of Bipolar II Disorder requires at least one hypomanic episode. This is used mainly to differentiate it from unipolar depression that has no manic episodes.

About 5.7 million American adults, or about 2.6 percent of the population aged 18 and older, have Bipolar Disorder. Although Bipolar Disorder often worsens over time if untreated, most people with it can achieve stabilization of their mood swings and reduction of symptoms with proper treatment. Treatment usually consists of medications known as "mood stabilizers."

MY STORY

When I joined a religious community at the age of thirty-six, I did not know I suffered from manic-depression or Bipolar Disorder nor did my community. Since the age of fourteen, I had suffered from bouts of highs and lows, but just considered them part of my life, a cross I had to bear. I had had a successful career as a high school teacher. In the schools I taught at, I was just considered an enthusiastic teacher. I used the summers as a time to regenerate and overcome my black moods of depression. Luckily, the summer vacations were sufficient when I was in my twenties and thirties to rejuvenate my spirit so that I was able to return in the fall as the same "outstanding" teacher who had taught the previous academic year.

At the age of thirty-six, when I entered the religious life, I felt it was only a new approach to what I had been doing up to that point. All my teaching had been in Catholic schools. I had attended Mass most of my life on a daily basis. I had tried studying before for the priesthood in the minor seminary, but had left. I had matured by my thirties or so I thought, and now was the time to fulfill my dream of becoming a monk and a priest. I took all the tests, although at that time they were not as many as today, talked to the Vocation Director, and appeared to be suited for the rigors of the religious and monastic life.

When I entered the community, I was the only novice. Nevertheless, the community still had in place all the rules and work as when there were seven novices. The challenge was formidable. I was thirty-six and alone in a novitiate designed in the 1940s or earlier. The rule was still blind obedience. On the surface it would appear that such a setting would not work for a manic-depres-

About 5.7 million American adults, or about 2.6 percent of the population aged 18 and older, have Bipolar Disorder.

sive. But for a person who has Bipolar Disorder structure is life saving, literally. As one of my psychiatrists later told me, "Monasticism saved your life. You should be dead from either suicide or alcoholism." My community at the time knew nothing of this.

TROUBLE BEGINS

I had a few minor breakdowns during my novitiate but no more than I had had over the years. At fourteen, for example, I had an undiagnosed "nervous episode," where I was barely able to function, but it went away apparently by itself. A similar episode occurred when I was eighteen years old. I entered a novitiate where I lasted six months and went home. I also had an episode in my sophomore year of college when I became sick and was unable to attend class for a week. When I came back and continued classes, however, I received mostly "A's." When I started my career as a teacher, I experienced the ups and downs that a bipolar person has, but summers still seemed to remedy the dark nights of my soul. And the novitiate was God's territory. So I offered everything up. I had one time during the novitiate where I lost control. It was at Christmas when no one helped with most of the preparation. Christmas morning I was so exhausted that by early evening I had to go to bed. As often happens in community, no one noticed.

After my novice year, I was sent to the seminary. I had a scholarship that paid all my tuition, and the Abbot had warned me that the community needed this financial help. As a result, I felt I must keep the scholarship, or I might not be able to continue. I entered my training with trepidation for I had to keep a 3.75 average or better. I threw myself into my studies and did nothing else. The first semester I got a 4.0. I continued to pressure myself, until one day one of my confreres said, "You know if you die tonight, the community will not put your grade point average on your grave stone."

It is not unusual for Bipolar Disorder to go undiagnosed by both the people who have it and those who live with them.

His statement pulled me back into reality, and after that things seemed to go much better.

Ordination and the first years of my returning to teaching went extremely well. I was able to hold my head above water as more and more duties were placed on me. As is said in most religious communities, "If you do a job well, you will get more and then even more to do." I was chairman of the English Department and taught four classes of Freshman English. I was Director of Vocations as well as Director of Admissions. I kept the full monastic schedule while having two evening study halls, did parish work on weekends, and every other week had daily Mass at other locales.

After five years of working at that pace, I started to break down. Once again no one noticed. I was good at hiding my ups and downs for I had years of practice. In the summer, I started to ride my bicycle twenty or thirty miles a day. It helped until I became manic about that as well.

BURNOUT

As time went on, however, I started to fall into deeper depressions followed by periods of mania or vice versa. No one noticed because I did not find this pattern of behavior strange. It is not unusual for Bipolar Disorder to go undiagnosed by both the people who have it and those who live with them. I just thought it was normal. Eventually I totally burned out at my first monastery, and then went to a second one where I was made Director of Campus Ministry. The second monastery did everything to accommodate my illness that still had not been diagnosed. As time went on it became more and more evident not only to the community but to myself that I needed help. I had become an associate professor of Education and was now tenured, but I kept doing more and more. It was as if I had to prove something even though the Abbot kept telling I did not.

I spent a year in England resting, studying, and recu-

perating from burnout. When I returned, however, I fell into the same pattern. Finally, when I was sixty years old, the Abbot, speaking for the community, asked me to see a psychiatrist. I agreed. And the rest is part of my personal history. In fifteen minutes, the psychiatrist diagnosed me as having Bipolar I with Post Traumatic Syndrome (PTS). I sat there relieved, for I finally had a name for what caused me to act the way I did. But the name alone did not ascertain the cause of my manic depression for the causes are multiple, a combination of chemical, genetic and environmental factors that trigger a Bipolar Disorder. Other members of my family suffered from depression, alcoholism was evident in the paternal branch of my family, and I lost my father when I was eight years old. All played into the triggering of my Bipolar Disorder. Immediately I was put on medications that helped control my mood swings. And with my new found understanding of my disorder, I have been able to change many if not all the patterns of behavior that are caused by manic depression in my life. I openly acknowledged this illness to the community, and I have worked toward controlling it ever since for I realize there is no cure for manic-depression. In the end, because of their awareness of my illness, members of my community have noticed the change in my behavior.

Although I put both of my communities through hell over the years, I was a very functional member of the community. At times, I did well. At other times, however, I was short-fused, suffered from moodiness or was totally exhausted from insomnia. But no one seemed to notice these behaviors, or if they did, no one confronted me on them.

HOW TO HELP—7 RECOMMENDATIONS

With my story told, I would now like to suggest some remedies for communities with members who suffer from Bipolar Disorder. You may not know who they are, but you may suspect the presence of problems. More importantly they may not know they have Bipolar Disorder, just as I did not know until I was sixty years of age. Nevertheless, more often than not, the person knows there is something wrong.

First, I would recommend that the community look for the symptoms. For example, moodiness, depression, and episodes of "the blues" lasting for long periods of time are danger signals. Complaints of insomnia, inability to sleep, or reported decreased need for sleep may also be signs of Bipolar Disorder. Another warning sign may be rapid, pressured speech, often marked by

a person's stumbling over his/her words. Still another indication is the ability to complete large-scale projects in a surprisingly short amount of time. For example, I wrote my doctoral dissertation, 260 pages, in three weeks. The Director of Campus Ministry observed this but could not believe it. She had a husband who was manic-depressive, but was afraid to suggest to me, a priest, that I was ill, especially mentally ill.

Second, in the Benedictine order, we have what is called "senpectae," members chosen to confront a man who has a problem, such as excessive alcoholic consumption or temper tantrums. The senpectae are chosen because they are gifted in the area of confrontation or because one may be a friend who has the person's confidence. These persons will try to win the monk over to the need of seeking help. This is a fifth century version of an intervention. St. Benedict was a wise man in more ways than one.

Only at age sixty, when I was totally exhausted, did someone confront me. Burnout is a factor that may contribute to episodes of manic-depression. It was those episodes of total burnout that gave the community a sign that I might need more than just rest or time away. My second community always was there for me. When I was burnt out, the Abbot would always ask, "What would you like to do?" And I would say "I would like to reduce my load." Although I was given permission to do so, I failed to recognize that I was dealing with a symptom, and not the cause. It wasn't until I was repeating the episodes that members of the community went to the superior and told him I needed help. At that time, the Abbot intervened, and I was ready to accept his advice. Would I have been ready at an earlier date or age? I do not know. It is a question that remains unanswered, but I knew something had to be done when I reached the end of the proverbial rope.

Third, the community should have a professional lined up for the member to see. The statement, "I think you should see someone," throws the member into an abyss of not knowing what to do or to whom to turn. My community had a psychiatrist in mind; thus, I did not have to go to the phone book to try to find one. I could pick up the phone and make an appointment. I could have said I would prefer another, and that would have been no problem. All the community wanted was for me to see someone. I needed help and they knew it. By that point, I did too.

Selecting a psychiatrist is like trying to find a spiritual director. Many are called, but few fit the bill. I worked with my first psychiatrist for two years. A

Selecting a psychiatrist is like trying to find a spiritual director. Many are called, but few fit the bill.

"recovering" Catholic who knew how to listen and knew the terminology of the Church, he did not say to me "The only cure is to leave your community." He started me on medication. He believed in creating as he said, "the right cocktail" of medications. He was not an expert in the treatment of Bipolar Disorder, however, and eventually, I knew I had to seek another psychiatrist when he was spending most of our sessions talking about his problems with me, the priest.

The community should anticipate that a member might possibly change doctors two or three times at the least. The most important role of community is to be supportive of these choices. Sometimes the simple question "Why?" is enough to elicit the reason(s) why the person is changing psychiatrists. No matter what the person's response, the question is valid and should be asked. When doubts are raised, invite the superior to talk with the new psychiatrist. I have never feared communication between my Abbot and my doctor. The founder of the Order of St. Benedict said, "There should be no secrets between the Abbot and his monks." I believe that wholeheartedly. If there is something I do not want shared among the two, I will tell my psychiatrist. But questions about work load, medications, what I need, and other questions are all valid points for discussion.

Fourth, a second opinion is never bad. Last year, just to check that everything was fine, my Abbot asked me to go to the St. Luke Institute in Maryland. I must admit I was taken aback by this request and at first balked. But then I realized this was for my good. My psychiatrist also thought it was a good idea. I came back reaffirmed that what I was doing was right. My medications were fine. The testing only reinforced what I was doing. And more than anything else I realized I was controlling the illness, and that there was no cure. My stay at St. Luke proved the good intentions of my community and their care and concern for me.

Fifth, the superior and the community should never feel "cowed" or held hostage by the person suffering from Bipolar Disorder. Bipolar Disorder is an ill-

ness. If a member of the community had cancer or diabetes, the members would afford that person all the medical help that the person needed but not allow that person to dictate how the community should act or what they should eat. Sometimes the person with Bipolar Disorder has to be told that his/her actions are inappropriate. Mood swings do not give a person permission to speak harshly or to attack a person inappropriately. Sometimes like a child in grade school, a person with Bipolar Disorder has to be told how to behave or given a time out. During a manic episode, a person with Bipolar Disorder sometimes speaks before thinking; the end result can sometimes be disastrous.

Sixth, the bipolar person can add much to a community by his/her talents, creativity, and intensity. The emotional balance now accomplished by the use of medication is phenomenal. I still feel creative and write poetry on a regular basis. If the community member takes the medicine prescribed by a psychiatrist, the person will likely be able to function quite well, often as they did before without the extremes of behavior that were symptomatic of their disease. I often wonder what would have happened if at age fourteen I had been diagnosed. Recently I gave a talk to a class in psychology and talked about my Bipolar Disorder. I expressed the wish it had been diagnosed at an earlier point in my life. One of the ladies in the class raised her hand and said, "But if it had been diagnosed when you were fourteen, there would not have been the drugs available that there are now." So true. God works in strange ways.

Seventh, mental illness is not something to be ashamed of by either the person receiving care or the community to which the person belongs. When I was a child, no one went to a psychiatrist. It was a disgraceful thing if one did. Today visiting a psychiatrist or therapist is only using the resources that are available in the community in order to live life more fully and normally.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this article has tried to describe Bipolar Disorder from the perspective of the person who has it, namely myself, and the response of the community in which that person lives. Sadly, a person who suffers from Bipolar Disorder wants help, but often is afraid to ask. A religious community must work with the member in order to rectify the situation so the member may become a more fruitful member of the institution.

One question that arises is "Should a person with

Bipolar Disorder be accepted into a religious community?" Naturally this is a multi-layered question. Has the person already suffered institutionalization? Is the person unwilling to accept his/her diagnosis of Bipolar Disorder? Does the community insurance cover the costs of medication and hospitalization? As with any decision, no community knows what will happen in the future. Is this disorder something the community is willing to deal with, and if so how? Questions of this sort would be better addressed in another article. This one deals only with those who are already members of a community.

It is my hope that these suggestions, coupled with my own personal story, may help religious communities deal with a member who suffers from Bipolar Disorder. Both the community and the person who suffers from this illness are confronted with challenges. I believe that a religious with Bipolar Disorder may be an asset to a religious community if only both sides, community and the person, try to understand the illness and work toward maintaining a balanced and structured life that assures stability for both community and religious.

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The Domestication of U.S. Religious Life

Seán D. Sammon, F.M.S.



During an address to the members of the Conference of Major Superiors of Men, then-president Stephen Glodek, S.M. told a story about a Rabbi who took a walk each evening through a wealthy neighborhood. Many who lived there hired watchmen to patrol their property at night.

One evening the Rabbi asked one of the guards the name of his employer and was given a familiar one in response. To the Rabbi's surprise the watchman then asked him the same question. "Wasn't it obvious to everyone," wondered the Rabbi, "that he worked for the Master of the Universe?" Now uncertain of himself, he answered, "I am sorry to say that I am not sure that I work for anyone. You see, I am the Rabbi in this town."

Then the Rabbi asked the watchman, "Will you come and work for me?" "Yes," replied the latter, "but what would my duties entail?" To which the Rabbi responded, "Just one thing: remind me for whom I work, in whose employ I am, and why I am here. Remind me; that is all."

Based on its particulars, Glodek's listeners might have concluded that they were the Rabbi in this tale, ever in need of being reminded for whom they work. But actually the proper place for

those of us who are members of religious institutes is among those who watch. We live on the perimeter and, like a well-formed conscience, remind the Church about the nature of its identity. For at its best our way of life is meant to be the Church's living memory of what it can and must be.

Today, however, this troubling question presents itself: Is religious life in the United States living out that prophetic role or failing in some fundamental way to be its own best self? Should the latter be true, not only will our way of life end up betraying the principles and values upon which it was founded, but the Church as a whole will suffer.

If we seek a promising answer to what we are asking, we must put aside differences, no matter how profound they appear to be at present, take matters in hand, and work together toward a common ground upon which to build the future of our way of life in this country. It is the least we can do. For consecrated life in America deserves the chance to become, once again, the "fire upon the earth" that it was meant to be.

HOW DID WE GET TO WHERE WE ARE TODAY?

How easy it would be, but also unfair, to place responsibility for the present crisis in U.S. religious life solely on those of us who are its members. We were among the first to embrace Vatican II's call for renewal. Years prior to that historic gathering, groups such as the Sisters Formation Conference and the Conference of Major Superiors of Men and the then-Conference of Major Superiors of Women, known today as the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, were already actively addressing calls on the part of Pius XII for religious to enter the modern era and ensure that their candidates received adequate formation and preparation for apostolic life. Any failure to live up to the true identity of our way of life cannot be credited to ill-will, nor is it due to want of trying.

At the same time, there is no denying the fact that as the overall Catholic population in the United States continues to increase in absolute numbers, those who make up the membership of religious institutes grow ever smaller in number and older in age. While, as members of those groups, we need to examine our respective consciences about the current state of renewal in our way of life, the process of self-evaluation cannot stop there. For at the very least three additional factors have contributed to the situation in

which our way of life in the United States finds itself at the moment.

To begin with, for good or ill, decisions taken by those participating in Vatican II put aside many traditional understandings about religious life, understandings upon which men and women religious had for centuries built their sense of meaning. For example, no longer was consecrated life to be seen as a middle way between the clerical and lay states but rather as something to which certain Christians are called by God, both from among the clergy and the laity.

During the years just prior to the Council our way of life began to pass through a period that would transform it in ways that we have yet to comprehend fully. In retrospect, for many men and women religious, and others in our Church, the words chosen to describe this phenomenon—"renewal," "updating," even "aggiornamento"—fell short of capturing fully the upheaval and turmoil, confusion and uncertainty, questions and doubts that existed in their minds and hearts as the very model or paradigm that had guided their way of thinking about consecrated life up until that time began to shift.

Next, as a Church in general, we were more than a little naïve about the impact of the changes set in motion by the Council. Few people warm to change; many become self-involved as a result of it. Be it planned or unplanned, the outcome is often the same: a certain chaos. The turmoil that has marked the years following the Council proved that the Church had no exemption from this predictable pattern.

Finally, men and women religious in the States set out on their period of experimentation about the same time that vast cultural shifts were beginning to get underway in American society, among them a move toward greater individualism and a more democratic understanding about the nature and purpose of authority. Understandably influenced by these developments a number of us ended up taking on some of the best characteristics found in our culture as well as others that were less compatible with traditional understandings of religious life. For example, a welcomed sense of autonomy emerged among the members of many religious institutes and great respect for each person and his or her beliefs and ideas was promoted and valued. At the same time excessive individualism was also evident among some and a growing professionalism began to replace the sense of being sent apostolically by the community at large.

These and other factors gave rise to a certain amount of confusion among men and women religious as well as on the part of the larger body of the faithful. In time, more than a few in both groups were left wondering about the role and purpose of religious life in today's Church in the United States.

VATICAN II

Lumen Gentium was to have more significance for religious life in North America than *Perfectae Caritatis*. Its fifth chapter turned on its head the pre-Conciliar three-tiered hierarchical ranking of the clerical, religious, and lay states that had existed up until that time within the Church. Appropriately characterized as "popular theology," this older model identified the priesthood as the highest calling in terms of vocation and ranked religious life a close second. Most Catholics were taught that only vowed members of religious orders could achieve spiritual perfection. The laity, unfortunately, were placed at a distant third, leaving many to feel like second-class citizens in their own Church.

Lumen Gentium declared that all Church members by virtue of baptism had an equal call to "the fullness of the Christian life and the perfection of charity," and thus put aside the ideology upon which religious life had been based for centuries. Subsequent Church documents have gone on to lay the foundation for fresher and more contemporary theologies of religious life; they have also helped clarify consecrated life's place in the charismatic rather than hierarchical structure of the Church. The implications of these emerging understandings, however, have yet to be widely understood or fully realized.

The seeds of other problems were also unintentionally sown about this time. The documents of Vatican II, for example, encouraged a measure of independence among men and women religious in their response to renewal. The process they used was to have the gospel at its heart and be based on the charism and spirit of each congregation's founder. Understandably this approach led not only to a considerable diversity in response but also, at times, to unrestrained initiatives on the part of the members of some religious congregations.

With the distinctiveness of religious life increasingly less evident, psychological independence growing, and understandings about vocation and commitment in flux, the vast cultural shifts taking place in the United States also began to have their influence on

Feminism has helped women reclaim their experience as women and to accept it as equally normative to that of men.

many religious sisters, priests and brothers. In time, a lack of visibility, increased individualism, less willingness to sacrifice, and a certain self-preoccupation collectively began to undermine among some the impulse toward generosity that has always been a distinct characteristic of those who made up the membership of religious congregations.

These developments were progressing at such a rate that in 1993 at the conclusion of their ten year comprehensive study of religious life in the United States, David Nygren, C.M. and Miriam Ukeritis, C.S.J., were moved to write: "Without significant change, religious life in the United States will continue to decline, and, more important, those who need the help of these orders will not be cared for."

UNFAIR JUDGMENTS

While some midcourse corrections in religious life's present-day journey of renewal in the United States are to be expected, the solution is not a return to the past. Neither does it lie in finding scapegoats on which to pin blame. At times an alleged lack of respect for Church authority on the part of more than a few men and women religious, feminism, or some other present day reality is held culpable for religious life's current difficulties. Consider feminism for a moment. Characterizing the legitimate concerns of women religious about inequalities in our Church as being the result of "radical feminism" is an oversimplification at best and adds nothing of substance to discussion about the fact that historically women have been treated as inferiors in almost every culture. That has certainly been the case in the United States and in the Church.

Feminism has helped women reclaim their experience as women and to accept it as equally normative to that of men and, thus, has had a positive influence on the renewal of religious life in the United States. For, at its best, feminism fosters dialogue, emphasizes interdependence in relationships, and strikes a balance between self-sacrifice for the good of others and self-assertion for the good of self and society.

We failed to understand the difference between change and transformation.

THE NATURE OF CHANGE

At this point in the process of renewal, we also need to admit that we were rather inexperienced as we approached the process of change. After all, the upheaval brought about by Vatican II was extraordinary and unprecedented in our Church. Many of us, however, held to the belief that if change was necessary and carefully explained, we could handle it. We failed to understand the difference between change and transformation. The first occurs at a point in time, the latter over time, giving people a chance to reorient themselves psychologically and spiritually.

What about mistakes? As we undertook the work of renewal, we were bound to make some. And we did. What is amazing, however, is the fact that we did not make more mistakes. Knowledge about the past can help us from repeating its mistakes. But the focus of our concern today must be about the present and future, especially in terms of understanding the consequences of the period we have just lived through and the implications for institutes of men and women religious and their leaders. To help achieve this end, we need to clarify the meaning and purpose of religious life. Put simply: What is its identity?

IDENTITY

In retrospect, the pre-Conciliar identity of many religious congregations appears elitist, with the pursuit of individual perfection given most often as the reason for the group's existence. Those among us who passed through a novitiate experience prior to the mid-1960s might remember learning that the purpose of the congregation was the glory of God and the sanctification of its members. This description was followed by a statement about the group's works, the specific apostolate for which it was founded.

During the process of renewal, however, we discarded a number of behaviors that for many years had distinguished our way of life from others. And rightly so, for more than a few of these old ways of acting had outlived their usefulness. Unfortunately, we have been delayed longer than many of us expected in finding and agreeing upon new behaviors more appropriate for the religious nature of our life and work today. As a consequence, over the course of the last forty years, that clear sense of who we are as a group and what we stand for has eroded steadily.

Our delay in finding and agreeing upon new behaviors is perplexing, for you and I already have considerable experience in dealing with questions of identity in our personal lives. At various points along life's journey, haven't we found ourselves asking once again the very same questions we asked as adolescents, "Who am I, and what do I cherish and hold dear?" And how did we manage to answer them anew? We explored a bit, stretched our boundaries, tested out our values. We also realized that to form a new identity or to reform an older and more familiar one, we would eventually have to make choices, recommit ourselves in a new way to the values that we had lived out up until that point in life or adopt new values.

If in our personal lives you and I realize that making choices is an important part of the process of forming an identity, what has interfered with our ability as a group to choose a new set of behaviors to distinguish us and each of our institutes from others? For one: our respect for diversity. Both Vatican II and *Vita Consecrata* anticipated that differences would emerge between institutes during the course of renewal. As they returned to their respective founder's charism and adapted themselves to the needs of their times, they were inevitably going to look different, one from another.

What the Council did not anticipate fully, however, was the amount of diversity that would exist within institutes themselves. And for some groups, these internal differences are considerable at the present time. For example, some groups lack a general agreement about what constitutes community life. The range of works that exist among the members of other groups makes it difficult to identify any common apostolate. Today, we need to remind ourselves that if significant diversity continues to exist over time within our institutes in terms of our outlook and those of fellow members on the vows, the meaning and place of community life, our spirituality, our works, the poor among us,

formation, and several other areas, the task of forming a common identity and the possibility of corporate witness will be all the more difficult, if not impossible.

What does this mean concretely? To form a new identity, one more suitable to our contemporary understandings about consecrated life, it will be necessary for all of us to accept this outcome: *while greater diversity will continue to exist between our congregation and others, less diversity within our individual congregations—in terms of the basic elements that make up our lives and works—will be more the norm.*

There was another reason also for our slowness to adopt new common practices and behaviors: our fear that to do so would signify a return to the past, to what might have been appropriate a half-century or more ago. Have no fear of that happening. The practices of the past were suitable for the past. However, if we are to re-establish the witness value of our way of life, we will need to find new signs to help us do so, and we will need to carry out that task together.

Our failure to take up this task thus far and to identify and evaluate all that we have learned during the process of renewal has had its consequences. We have avoided, for example, asking ourselves these questions: How do our current practices express our love for Jesus Christ and our commitment to the Church in a credible way? How do they support and enhance our mission? How do they promote greater passion for the gospel and for the service of the poor?

Ideally religious life should be distinguished by its radical commitment to the mission of Jesus as well as the specific works carried out by its members. Because of its relationship to the mission of the Church, it follows also that our way of life should be visible. The evangelical counsels, as well as the ideals of love for God, passionate concern for the poor and needy, and commitment to community life must be translated in a unique way in each institute and congregation into behaviors that others can see and understand. Without such corporate behaviors, there is no visibility; without visibility, there is no witness.

And so if we wish to achieve greater clarity about our identity today, we must ask and answer these two questions: What are we meant to be? What are we meant to do? In working to arrive at a commonly agreed upon understanding about what constitutes community life, formation, a unique apostolic spirituality, our works, we will understandably begin with a plurality of opinions. Our groups are diverse, often

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international in character, and facing different challenges in the various regions of our world in which they are located. Eventually, however, we must arrive at a common ground.

Today we can cite three characteristics as marking a religious institute with a strong identity. First of all, the purpose for the group's existence is clear, the values for which it stands obvious, the difference its presence makes in the world apparent. The group has character, a backbone.

Second, a religious institute's identity is clear when people understand what makes it different from other similar groups and especially from those that might have a comparable mission or serve the same population of people. For example, if the group's mission is to evangelize through education—a work that many religious institutes claim as their own—identity is clear only when the group can demonstrate that theirs is a distinct and unique approach to the task at hand.

Finally, the identity of any group is dependent upon those values that it espouses that also stand the test of time. What values, there since the beginning, continue to sustain the group and its members?

We might console ourselves by thinking that for many in the Church today our identity is clear. The fact that we profess publicly to live fully and radically the Gospel plan as the object of our lives makes us very different from others. A troubling question for a number of us, however, is this one: in all aspects of our life and work at this time in history, how closely do we resemble that description?

Religious life in the United States today appears to be right where it should be in the process of renewal. As institutes we have suffered shocking losses in the last half century, and they have been not only in the area of personnel. For we have been chastened also by disappointment, failure, and scandal.

At the same time, those of us who make up the membership of consecrated life in this country appear to be in a more perilous place than we have encountered in the last four decades. For the decisions that we make today will have implications for years to come and could well determine the future viability and vitality of our way of life in Church and society in the United States.

For the last forty years we have used one human means after another in our attempts to renew our way of life. But facilitation, pastoral plans and feasibility studies are but means to an end. Only a profound revolution of the heart and faith will get the job done. Religious life was never meant to be balanced, professional, with regular hours, clear job descriptions, and all sorts of guarantees. Rather it was meant to entail enough sacrifice to be worth the gift of our lives.

In 1686, after more than 30 years of exile in Bilbao, Spain, two Irish women, members of the Dominican congregation, set out once again for the land of their birth. They did so at the urging of the then-Provincial of the Friars of Saint Dominic; he judged it safe enough to establish once again a convent in Galway in the west of Ireland.

Rising to the challenge Juliana Nolan and Mary Lynch made their way home in an open boat. They did so with full knowledge that upon their arrival in Ireland they would face many unknowns. When the full and final history of Dominican life in the Church is written, these two women will hold prominent places. They endured exile, war, political upheaval, the crushing anti-Catholic penal laws, hazardous journeys, and financial insecurity to reestablish in the land of their birth the Dominican way of life. Mary was 60 when she took up this task; her companion Juliana was 75.

While this tale has the capacity to inspire, it also includes other important applications for us today. First of all, these two women took bold, daring, unexpected action to renew their way of life in very difficult circumstances. Their simple courage should inspire us today to put aside ideologies, fixed positions, and excuses such as age, fear, or lack of experience and ask instead: "In all that has transpired during almost a half century of renewal, what has been of the Spirit and what has not?"

Concretely that means examining anew areas such as mission and apostolate, life in community, and the meaning of our public profession to live radically the Good News of Jesus Christ. Today, we must ask ourselves: If those who founded our institutes paid a visit

to our works and living arrangements as they exist currently, would they recognize the congregation that they had set in motion, or would they, instead, be moved to found it once again?

Those of us who are men and women religious have been entrusted with the task of renewing our way of life. This sacred trust cannot fall victim to personal preference, or the fear that giving my brothers and sisters any claim over me signals a return to the past. We need, instead, to seize the opportunity we have to reclaim the heart of our way of life and to give it a place in today's world. To do so will call for self-sacrifice, open-mindedness, willingness to change, and a passion for Jesus and his Good News.

Our place is among those who watch. Let us take the steps necessary to once again be the Church's living memory of what it can, should, and must be. In so doing our hearts will be transformed and we will find the simple courage, sustaining hope, and spirit of faith needed to complete the journey of renewal that still lies ahead.

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DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Gerald D. Coleman, S.S.



Polygamist Warren Steed Jeffs, leader of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints, was arrested in September 2006 on charges of rape as an accomplice for his alleged role in ordering a polygamous marriage between an underage girl and an adult church member. Allegations also include sexual crimes against minors, welfare fraud, tax evasion, and domestic violence.

While sensational in many ways, this case is a cogent reminder that domestic violence is a prominent public health issue in the United States. It is the most frequent cause of serious injury to women, more than car accidents, muggings, and stranger rapes combined. A new Harvard School of Public Health study demonstrates conclusively that physical abuse by husbands and boyfriends compromises a woman's health during pregnancy, her likelihood of carrying a child to term, and the health of her newborn. Domestic violence is a moral and often criminal issue facing society and all healthcare services and institutions. Domestic violence is a pastoral problem facing every parish and diocese. While domestic violence may include women abusing men, the vast majority of reported cases concern men abusing women.

It became clear at the 1995 International Women's Conference in Beijing that there was a lack of hard data on the issue of domes-

tic violence. The Conference asked the World Health Organization to study the problem. It issued its findings in October 2006 in *Lancet*, a medical journal in London. The study demonstrates that violence by an intimate partner is a common experience worldwide, both in the developed and developing world, in rural and urban areas. This study is the most comprehensive and scientific analysis to date of domestic violence.

THE MEANING OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic violence is defined as the use or threat of use of physical, emotional, verbal, or sexual abuse with the intent of instilling fear, intimidating, and controlling behavior. Domestic violence occurs within the context of an intimate relationship and may continue after the relationship has ended. The term intimate partner violence is often used synonymously, while other terms are sometimes employed such as wife beating, wife battering, man beating, husband battering, relationship violence, spousal abuse, and family violence.

Various types of domestic violence have been described, types that are often overlapping:

- Physical abuse: pushing, shoving, hitting, punching, biting, kicking, holding down, pinning against the wall, choking, throwing objects, breaking objects, punching walls, driving recklessly to scare, blocking exits, using weapons. Physical abuse can include rape and murder. Physical abuse is almost invariably preceded by psychological abuse.
- Emotional/psychological/mental abuse: name calling, coercion and threats, criticizing, yelling, humiliating, isolating, gestures threatening to hurt children or pets, stalking that causes the victim a high level of fear, verbal threats of violence.
- Economic abuse: controlling finances, preventing the victim from working; it is common for the victim to receive less money as the abuse continues.
- Social abuse: preventing the victim from seeing relatives and friends, actively sabotaging a victim's social relationships, isolating the victim from social contacts.
- Sexual abuse: unwanted touching, sexual name calling, false accusations of sexual infidelity, forced sex, sexually transmitted disease, HIV transmission; sexual abuse includes having sex with a person who is unable to understand the nature and condition of the act(s), e.g., due to illness, disability, the influence of alcohol or other drugs, intimidation and fear.
- Spiritual abuse: using the victim's religious or spiritu-

al beliefs to manipulate them, preventing the victim from practicing his or her religious or spiritual beliefs, ridiculing the victim's religious or spiritual beliefs.

Early signs of abuse should be seen as red flags that might point to serious abusive behavior: quick whirlwind romance, wanting to be with you all the time, tracking what you are doing and who you are with, jealousy at any perceived attention from others, attempts to isolate you in the guise of loving behavior, e.g., you do not need to work or go to school as we only need each other, hypersensitivity to perceived slights, quick to blame others for the abuse, and pressures on you to do things you are not comfortable with, e.g., if you really love me, you'll do this for me.

The forms of abuse may vary, but the result is the same. Domestic violence exchanges the natural bonds of love and nurturing for the unnatural relationship of aggressors trampling mercilessly on the dignity, rights and aspirations of those they promised to love and cherish.

THE DYNAMICS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

There are several ways of understanding the interactions between the batterer and the victim.

Cycle of Violence: this cycle has three stages: the tension building stage (tension in the relationship gradually increases over time), the acute battering stage (tension erupts resulting in threats or use of violence and abuse), and the honeymoon stage (the batterer may be apologetic and remorseful and promise not to be abusive again). This cycle continues throughout the relationship, with the honeymoon stage becoming shorter and the episodes of battering becoming more frequent or more severe.

Traumatic Bonding: strong emotional connections develop between the victim and the perpetrator during the abusive relationship. These emotional ties develop due to the imbalance of power between the batterer and the victim, and because the relationship is intermittently good and bad. As the abuser gains more power, the victim feels worse about him- or herself and is less able to be self-protective. The abused person becomes increasingly dependent on the abuser. Due to the intermittent and unpredictable abuse, the victim is often shown positive behaviors such as attention, gifts and promises. The abused person feels relief that the abuse is over. The intermittent cycle of the abusive behavior serves to strengthen the bond between the abuser and the victim.

Approach and Avoidance: the mix of love and economic support and fear and humiliation present in the battering relationship leads to ambivalence on the part of the victim. This struggle between wanting to keep the relationship and wanting to remain safe makes it difficult to decide whether to leave or stay. Women tend to leave and return to an abusive relationship five times before permanently leaving.

THE CAUSES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

There is no one cause of domestic violence. Most authorities agree that abusive personalities result from a combination of several factors. Identified and proposed causes include a need for power and control. An abuser's efforts to dominate a victim have been attributed to low self-esteem, feelings of inadequacy, unresolved childhood conflicts, the stress of poverty, hostility, resentment toward women (misogyny), personality disorders, genetic tendencies, and socio-cultural influences.

Identified causes of domestic violence include the privileges the abuser perceives to be gained in establishing control over his or her partner. Some of these rewards include the intrinsic satisfaction of power and control, getting one's way, blaming another for one's problems, being the center of attention with priority given to the abuser's needs, financial control.

The degree to which abuse correlates with poverty and the extent to which poverty causes abuse is ambiguous. While there is more data from low-income than middle or upper income families, this does not confirm that domestic violence is more prevalent among poor families than wealthier ones. It is premature to conclude that poverty is an important causative factor in domestic violence, especially since more data is becoming available that domestic violence takes place across socio-economic lines.

It is important to note that substance abuse often occurs in conjunction with domestic violence and may heighten the severity of the abuse by impairing the abuser's judgment. While substance abuse and violent behavior are not necessarily intertwined, it is demonstrable that when combined, domestic violence becomes more strident and ferocious. Substance abuse is then often misinterpreted as an "excuse" by the abuser for his or her behavior.

THE EFFECTS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic violence has wide ranging and sometimes long-term effects on victims. These effects can be phys-

ical and psychological and can impact the direct victim as well as any children who witness parental violence. Children residing in homes where domestic violence occurs are themselves 50-55% of the time victims of physical or sexual assault. This terror experienced by children contributes to lifelong difficulties. Over 50% of men who abuse their wives also beat their children. Children who grow up in violent homes are more likely to develop alcohol and drug addictions and to become abusers themselves. The stage is set for a cycle of violence that may continue from generation to generation.

Children exposed to domestic violence are at risk for developmental problems, psychiatric disorders, school difficulties, aggressive behavior, and low self-esteem.

Victims of domestic violence may experience certain physical effects such as lacerations, bruises, broken bones, head injuries, internal bleeding, chronic pelvic pain, abdominal and gastrointestinal complaints, frequent vaginal and urinary infections, sexually transmitted diseases and HIV. Women victims may experience pregnancy-related problems, especially if battered during pregnancy, e.g., miscarriage, low infant birth rate, injury or death to the fetus.

There are also a number of psychological effects of domestic violence. Depression remains the foremost response, with 60% of battered women reporting depression. In addition, battered women are at greater risk for suicide attempts, with 25% of battered Caucasian women attempting suicide and 50% of battered African American women attempting suicide. Along with depression, domestic violence victims may also experience Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which is characterized by symptoms such as flashbacks, intrusive imagery, nightmares, anxiety, emotional numbing, insomnia, and hyper-vigilance.

THE PREVALENCE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

In the United States, domestic violence is the single most significant cause of injury to women, affecting about two million women per year. Some sources estimate that as many as four million women suffer some kind of battering every year. Women's greatest risk of violence comes from a current or former husband or boyfriend. Women ages 16 to 24 are nearly three times as vulnerable to attacks by intimate partners as those in other age groups. Abused women between 35 and 49 run the highest risk of being killed. It is important to keep in mind that many abuses resulting from domestic violence are

not reported to the police for fear of retaliation and threats from the abuser, as well as the shame associated with having a partner who is violent. Domestic violence occurs in all cultures, races, ethnicities and religions. It is perpetrated by and on women and men, and occurs in both opposite-sex and same-sex relationships. Some statistics highlight the problem in the United States:

- 20-30% of women will be physically abused by a partner at least once in their lifetime.
- 834,732 men are physically assaulted by an intimate partner annually.
- 201,394 women are forcibly raped by an intimate partner annually.
- 11% of women and 23% of men in same-sex relationships report being raped, physically assaulted and/or stalked by an intimate partner each year.
- 30-40% of women's emergency room visits are for injuries due to domestic violence.
- 30% of women murdered in the United States are killed by their husbands or boyfriends.
- 50% of men who assault their female partners also assault their children.
- 3.3 million children witness domestic violence each year.

In the United States, between three billion and five billion dollars are spent annually for medical expenses related to domestic violence and approximately 100 million dollars is lost by businesses annually through lost productivity, sick leave and absenteeism due to domestic violence.

RESPONSES TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Historically there has been a mindset of treating domestic violence as a personal problem of minor consequence. This attitude permitted the abuser to continue his or her violent behavior. Often police merely ask the abuser to leave the residence for a period of time. In the past decade, a better understanding of the scope and effect of domestic violence on victims and families has brought about changes in the criminal justice system. Women's Advocacy Groups and Men's Behavior Change Programs have done a great deal in addressing domestic violence.

National and local resources are available in various social service programs and centers for medical care. Websites are also available for help, e.g., National Resource Center on Domestic Violence (www.nrcdv.org), the Battered Women's Justice Project (www.bwjp.org), the Domestic Violence and Mental Health Policy

Initiative (www.dvmhpi.org) and the Rape Abuse and Incest National Network (www.rainn.org).

MARRIAGE, THE CHURCH AND SCRIPTURE

On July 8, 2006, Pope Benedict XVI spoke to the Fifth World Meeting of Families in Valencia, Spain:

The family is the privileged setting where every person learns to give and receive love.... This is what [the church] teaches and God, who is love and who created man and woman for love, has called them to love. By creating man and woman he called them to an intimate communion of life and love in marriage. The family is itself based primarily on a deep interpersonal relationship between husband and wife, sustained by affection and mutual understanding. Would that our children might experience more harmony and affection between their parents, rather than disagreement and discord ("The Family's Essential Role," *Origins* 36 [2006], 129-132).

Discord can be experienced in the form of domestic violence which sullies, damages, and often destroys marriage and the family. Reflecting on this critical problem, the Catholic bishops of the United States issued in 1992 and 2002 *When I Call for Help: A Pastoral Response to Domestic Violence Against Women*. They condemn all forms of domestic violence and indicate that it is never justified and constitutes a sin and often a crime.

The bishops taught that violence treats a person as an object to be used and violates the very meaning of marriage and the family. In answer to the question, "How do these violent acts relate to my promise to take my spouse for better or for worse?" the bishops reply that the person being assaulted needs to know that acting to end the abuse does not violate the marriage promises. The Church's canon law supports this judgment. Canon 1153:1 maintains:

If either of the spouses causes grave mental or physical danger to the other spouse or to the offspring or otherwise renders common life too difficult, that spouse gives the other a legitimate cause for leaving, either by decree of the local ordinary or even on his or her own authority if there is danger in delay. If it can be

shown that a petitioner in an annulment case feared the respondent during the time of their courtship and into the marriage, the vows taken by the couple are not valid due to fear and sometimes force.

In the past, abused women particularly were often counseled by priests to stay in or return to a violent marriage. This admonition was likely built on the hope of supporting marriage and the family. Very often, however, it amounted to complicity by encouraging the abused to return to the abuser. This type of advice is unconscionable and could well lead to further victimization of the abused.

No person is expected to stay in an abusive marriage. The bishops state this clearly: "Violence and abuse, not divorce, break up a marriage. We encourage abused persons who have divorced to investigate the possibility of seeking an annulment. An annulment can frequently open the door to healing."

Scripture has been frequently and wrongly used to justify husbands dominating their wives. St. Paul teaches that wives should be submissive to their husbands (Ephesians 5:22). The context for this counsel gets lost in abusive situations. The entire passage (vv. 21-33) refers to the *mutual* submission of husband and wife out of love for Christ. Paul tells husbands to love their wives as they love their own body and as Christ loves the Church. The Gospel mandate is that spouses give their lives for one another as Christ gave his life for the Church. Husbands and wives must love each other and consider and treat each other as equals.

In his commentary on this text, Pope John Paul II stressed that love excludes any subjection whereby a wife is a servant, slave, or object of domination by the husband. John Paul insisted on the equality and equal dignity of women and men. In fact, no pope has ever so strongly defended and proclaimed this equality.

Abused spouses may even see their suffering as a just punishment from God for something they have done in the past. She may say, "This is God's will for me." This image of a harsh and cruel God is contrary to the biblical image of God as kind, merciful and loving. Jesus showed extraordinary compassion to suffering women, for example in the woman with the hemorrhage (Mark 5:25-34) and the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11). Christ's way of acting is a consistent protest against whatever offends the dignity of women.

Abusers frequently distort Jesus' command to for-

give our enemies (Matthew 6:9-15). An abused victim is made to feel guilty for not forgiving the abuser. However, forgiveness does not mean that the abuse is to be forgotten or condoned. Forgiveness is not permission to repeat the abuse.

The teaching found in Genesis is foundational. Both man and woman are created in God's image and are created equal. Both reflect God and together complement one another. Both derive their inherent dignity, personal goodness, and original beauty from God. God delights in the creation of man and woman and affirms their existence by exclaiming, how good it is (Genesis 1:31).

CONCLUSION

The church preaches a Gospel of Life. The church desires to help all those who are abused, and all those who abuse. *When I Call for Help* is a pledge on the part of the Catholic bishops of the United States to work vigorously against domestic violence and to place the church's resources at the service of abused women, as well as their abusers. The bishops have asked all dioceses, parishes and organizations to make domestic violence a priority issue. Abused women can find in the church a haven for help. Abusers can find in the church a place to guide them to seek necessary help and conversion.

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“I’m Bored!”

What Does This Mean Today?

Suzanne Mayer, I.H.M., Ph.D.



When my sisters and I were little, the days of play lengthened and the time seemed to hang heavy on us as the month of August moved its slow way through the summer. Typically, we would then go to our mother and complain that we were “bored!” She had her own customary response to that. “Don’t tell me you’re bored,” she would warn. “Find something to do with your time, or I will find something to fill it.” We knew what she meant. With a large family she always had some household chores that needed doing: closets cleaned, flowerbeds weeded, floors scrubbed. That was not what we had in mind. She never told us what we should “find” to counter the boredom; that was up to us to devise. So, each month of August we would discover “new” adventures to enter into, from building a lemonade stand on the corner, to volunteering at the local SPCA, to joining the library reading club. As long as it was creative, my mother gave her tacit permission to escape the routines of the house.

LOOKING FOR MORE LIFE

Recently, in working with a number of women religious, espe-

ally younger ones, on retreat, in conferences, and as pastoral counselor, I have heard the same complaint: "I am bored." When I have probed into the meaning of this term, I have understood a definition different from that of the dull drag of the end of summer vacation. The being bored of which these women speak is characterized more by a lack of meaning in what they do than in too much free time to fill. They speak of being busy, constantly busy, but of finding no sense of purpose in the many occupations, jobs, responsibilities that fill their day.

One young religious, reflecting on her sense of "boredom," stated, "I dread saying this in my community, local or large, because I know that the answer will be to find more things for me to do. I am not looking for more work; I am looking for more life." And yet as I sat with this 30-year old woman and others like her, I realized that, while their mantra is "I am bored," they are anything but boring. The individuals who share this confession of ennui seem to me most vital, interesting and creative, and this difference between them and their complaint is significant.

MENTAL ILLNESS AND BOREDOM

The Princeton professor and pastoral theologian Robert Dykstra relates a now well-known and exceptionally insightful incident that occurred with the British psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott shortly before his death. While giving a conference to a group of Anglican clergy Winnicott was asked how a minister might know if a troubled parishioner who comes to him needs the pastoral support that he as clergy is able to give or should be referred for professional help. Winnicott stated that he was "taken aback by the awesome simplicity" of the question and in response offered a guideline that pointed to the unconscious redirection of the feelings of the parishioner to the pastor: "If a person comes and talks to you, and listening to him, you feel he is boring you, then he is sick and needs psychiatric treatment. But if he sustains your interest, no matter how grave his distress or conflict, then you can help him aright." Being boring signified for Winnicott emotional distress severe enough to warrant serious mental health intervention.

An earlier psychological pioneer, Melanie Klein, explains that finding someone boring communicates the collapse of internal space so necessary for human relationship. When an individual, through trauma,

The being bored of which these women speak is characterized more by a lack of meaning in what they do than in too much free time to fill.

emotional or physical abandonment, early chaos or other significant deprivation, experiences a lack of formative inter-human reflection and mirroring, he or she comes to have little or no ability to form the interior reflective space necessary for the differentiation of self from the world. All that is *other* merges with self, allowing no capacity for the *other* to enter. Such persons operate in a paradox of nonproductive psychic space. Filled with a type of dead sterility, their psyche forms a sort of trapped vacuum—nothing but chaos within with no room for admittance of any revitalizing element. With no capacity for contemplative space, such persons are experienced by another, especially an intuitive other, as sterile, lifeless, "boring."

The young women I encounter do not seem dull, tedious or wearisome; so this paradox of full but empty would indicate that they are not developmentally dulled. A different explanation seems to lie in their cry of "I'm bored!" A look at the phenomenon of boredom through both psychosocial and spiritual lenses may suggest both cause and relief.

TWO KINDS OF BOREDOM

One type of boredom common across most age groups and American sub-cultures does seem to be a spreading plague, more real than avian flu, more pervasive than pollutants in the water. Donald McCullough, in a comprehensive article on the phenomenon, suggests that there are two forms of boredom, with the first more of a personal choice. He states that this form "results from turning our backs on what life has to offer" and connects it to the capital sin of acedia, "a choice for death, a willing separation from the joys of life" (p. 31). While there is some truth in the heightened awareness and seemingly insidious nature of boredom in post-modern culture of which he speaks, my sense of the cry of the women I have men-

This state of emptiness, a result of a kind of existential overactivity, creates, even for the most highly functioning of modern individuals, a cacophony of chaos and a sort of constant soul-claustrophobia.

tioned is that their option is not to “slumber through life without really waking up,” but of an inundation, socially, professionally, even ministerially.

This leads to McCullough’s second kind of boredom. A product of the too much, too soon, too fast environment, boredom results from the metronome of contemporary life beating a rhythm in the brain of the post-modern person. This pulse, coming since before birth and throughout life, is absorbed from the milieu like a virus. Few even realize how much their internal and external worlds are set to the beat of an endless, erratic drummer. As the drumbeat drones, interior reality fills with noise, like the static background of a radio out of range.

THE MODERN COLLAPSE OF CONTEMPLATIVE SPACE

The German philosopher and anthropologist Max Picard describes “the situation with people today” as exactly opposite from the world of “the old Masters.” Writing in the World War II and post-war era, he has been celebrated as a forerunner of modern existential philosophers. He notes: “The primary factor is movement for its own sake, movement that hits a definite target only by accident, movement that happens before it has been decided why it is happening, movement that is always ahead of man himself” (p. 63). In his powerful, reflective work Picard sees the human dilemma as one in which, because of the loss of silence and the disappearance of contemplative space, the whole of human economy—words, meaning, relationships—has all collapsed into an “alternative of obstinacy and despair” in which language itself acquires a hardness, “as though it were making a great effort to remain alive in spite of the emptiness” (p. 41).

This state of emptiness, a result of a kind of existential overactivity, creates, even for the most highly func-

tioning of modern individuals, a cacophony of chaos and a sort of constant soul-claustrophobia. Without and within is the booming, buzzing bombardment that Picard describes. An intriguing report of such chaos and concomitant ennui came from a dream and its analysis offered by a religious woman I met on retreat.

A DREAM

She came after a day of feeling what she described as a kind of “spiritual malaise” and a night of restlessness leaving her very fatigued. “I guess I finally got to sleep around 3:00 a.m. or so, and sometime after had a strange dream.” She found herself, in the dream as was true in her real life, being assigned to move a large school into a much smaller one and feeling overwhelmed with the task. “Everywhere I looked were huge boxes and containers, piles of books and tumbled furniture. Then all of a sudden I came into this one room, I think perhaps my office. Like all the others, everything was pushed together into this too-small space leaving no space to breathe much less move.” Then she saw herself approached by another religious woman who seemed to be assisting with the move. “I recognized her,” she said, “as a colleague from a former assignment. A gentle and calm soul, she moved into the room with me, and, as we stepped past the piles, together we noticed a section blocked off by a tumble of chairs and desks. I wanted to push the furniture aside, in fact, to overturn the entire pile, but she just reassured me that we would be fine making our way around it.” Then the retreatant moved to the other side of the wall where she found a large space, dark and still crowded with heavy furniture, “kind of a man’s den with bookcases filled to overflowing and towering to the ceiling.” Taking several other steps, she noticed a large arched doorway to the side, with “lovely cantilevered windows, partly open with soft sunlight beaming through them.” Turning to point this out to her companion, she found, to her surprise, that the whole area had opened up to twice its size.

When I asked her the meaning of her dream, she related it to the highly stressful task of moving the schools. “There is too much for me to do, and all I seem to get is frustrated with each unfinished day. I am constantly impatient, but at the same time almost lethargic. While I am known to be a worker, an organizer and very responsible in whatever is asked of me, I just feel myself plodding along in all this, dragging

behind me an ever heavier load.”

I observed to her that many dream interpreters suggest that the presence of a building of any kind in a dream represents the self, and that if the dream event occurs inside the structure, it represents the unconscious. “Suppose,” I suggested, “the building into which you are moving doesn’t represent your current assignment, but your psyche, your inner self.” She took off with the connection. “Then,” she said, “the docked-off space I discovered is the more that rests inside of me, that part of me that seeks time and space for reflection.” She observed that periods of such in-depth quiet had become few lately. “Didn’t I hear as well that all persons in a dream represent part of yourself?” she said and then continued, “If so, then the other sister is that part of me that can be observing, meditative and centered. The protagonist in me wants to push ahead, to do more, to shove things around, but that other part, perhaps more intuitive, understands that what I need is to allow openness. As that happens I will discover more freedom in myself and in my life.”

FINDING RUAH—SPIRIT AND SPACE

As fascinating as the dream and analysis proved, the next part of our time together was even more powerful and suggested another aspect to consider in response to “I’m bored.” From the image of the widening out of the “man’s den,” the retreatant and I moved into a place of the Spirit. She confessed a sense of neglect of spirit, her own and God’s, as the tasks of her assignment multiplied. She had noticed that, even when she carved out some time to be quiet, the craziness inside her head and heart kept moving like “a gerbil on one of those exercise wheels inside the cage.” What she longed for was the breath of the Spirit, moving in and through the chaos.

That image changed into a meditation on the creation passages in the book of Genesis (chapters 1 and 2) that we had shared prayerfully on a retreat several years before. She had loved them and called them to mind often, the poetic lines capturing the movement of Ruah, God’s creative spirit, across the face of the void, bringing the primordial elements into a harmonious order, allowing the breath that is life to separate dark from light, sky from earth, sea from ground (Genesis 1:2).

One resolution to boredom is the movement to the realization that we are not empty, but too full, and of all the wrong things. Like the original ooze of Genesis,

The response to boredom, then, seems to lie not in terminating its experience with more activity, but in opening up what Winnicott called the “transitional space,” the play area in which mind and spirit can engage imaginatively with a freedom that defies limits.

we have all the ingredients of fullness of life, but instead of it “springing up inside as a life-giving water” (John 4:14), it is roiled and boiled into the meaningless nothing that is a void. It waits for space to redeem it.

Child analyst, Adam Phillips, touches on that positive side in describing the boredom he sees forming in his young clients, as “a precarious process in which the child is, as it were, both waiting for something and looking for something, in which hope is being secretly negotiated . . . In the muffled, sometimes irritable confusion of boredom the child is reaching a recurrent sense of emptiness out of which his real desire can crystallize.” The rush to rescue the child from the boredom dooms him/her to a life that “must be seen to be endlessly interesting” (quoted in Dykstra). So, the routine of constant afternoons in which toddlers are ferried from t-ball, to music lessons, to charm school, to French lessons begins and the possibility for a contemplative holding within disappears.

The response to boredom, then, seems to lie not in terminating its experience with more activity, but in opening up what Winnicott called the “transitional space,” the play area in which mind and spirit can engage imaginatively with a freedom that defies limits. In words that almost ring as poetry Ann Ulanov describes the transitional space in spiritual terms:

“This transitional space is our first opening up to and moving into the experiences of being and becoming, our first opportunity to experience the evolving power of living full out, with all our heart and mind and strength. . . Our transition is to something somewhere, a movement toward the ultimate, to something that endures” (p. 6).

As I reflected on the opening up of space, a small postcard picture that sits on my desk caught my eye. It depicts a modern sculpture that stands in the Church of Sts. Joseph and Medardus in Cologne, Germany. The few words on the back in English, German and Spanish pray: "We live in the heart of God. May the holy triune God live in our hearts and the hearts of all people." The image on the front is of a silhouette in stone; two large and very abstract figures face each other with heads bent together and hands clasped. The bending and clasping figures form a circle of open space within the stone in which a golden globe of the world is cradled. Around the circumference of this hollow a white glow sharply outlines the space. When I first received the card, I studied the image for a while, read the words and then asked the friend who had given it to me how these two figures could represent the "triune God." She answered that she, too, had at first wondered at that, but musing on it brought this insight: "Of course, the two embracing figures represent the creating Father and saving Son, but the space and the light that surround the globe is the Holy Spirit."

How right! How poetic! How theologically true! The Spirit of life is the invisible presence of God made visible in creation and in the person of Jesus. In these post-Pentecost days, the Spirit remains the breath of God, the warmth of God, the presence of God, not just supporting the world and its creatures but enfolding us.

EMBRACING SILENCE

This image of God wrapped around the world touches into another form of boredom of which McCullough writes, one "inherent to life itself . . . that comes from being made for something more than we now experience . . . this second type can never find fulfillment within worldly limitations" (p. 32). This speaks, of course, of the yearning of the Augustinian confession: "My heart thirsts for you, O Lord, and is ever restless until it rests in you." While words such as search, yearn, thirst and restless might sound more symptomatic of anxiety than boredom, the lived experience is that in this life the dissatisfaction of never reaching that goal can lead to a certain ennui. McCullough parallels this existential ennui to the dissatisfaction, even apathy of the sated child who still

looks for more. The relief from this boredom is again not escape but embrace. Once again, as Picard notes this embrace wraps itself around contemplative silence. Without the silence, the object of the search fades and the yearning finds its immediate relief in the here and now. To hold the awe and allow the yearning to become a creative tension inside, a sort of spiritual hunger silence is necessary. Picard writes:

It is a sign of the love of God that a mystery is always separated from man by a layer of silence. And that is a reminder that man should also keep a silence in which to approach the mystery. Today, when there is only noise in and around man, it is difficult to approach the mystery. When the layer of silence is missing, the extraordinary easily becomes connected with the ordinary, with the routine flow of things, and man reduces the extraordinary to a mere part of the ordinary, a mere part of the mechanical routine (pp. 227-228).

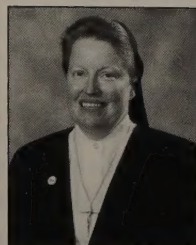
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